Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia

Proceedings of the Conference on Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia

10-12 November 2008, Kathmandu, Nepal

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LDC Watch /SAAPE /KDF /ARENA
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St. Address:
288 Gairidhara Marg, Gairidhara, Kathmandu, Nepal
Tel: 977-1-4427823, 4434165, 4425755, 4422153
Fax: 977-1-4004508 & 4443494
Email: rrn@rrn.org.np
Website: www.rrn.org.np
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FOREWORD

Asia is the largest continent in terms of area, population and diversity that it adores. The delegates of the Regional Conference on Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia, who came from different countries of Asia, representing political parties, civil societies, academia, trade unions, peasants, women, human rights defenders, planners, practitioners and different minority groups have profusely contributed to the discourse of democracy, development and peace in the contemporary world, with a focus on Asia. Their observations and interactions were based on relevant theories propounded and practices being experienced. Isolated debates on civil and political rights arguing for highest standard of democracy without intertwining to economic, social and cultural rights and right to development may remain fruitless for the large sections of people who are aspiring prosperity and peace, but have been pushed to the margin by each such endeavours. Many Asian societies have been in 'democratic era' of one or the other form for different durations, but they seem largely unsuccessful achieving even the minimum standard of living that they wished for so long. As a consequence of the successive failures of the 'democracies' that we have practiced, people are in continuous war, and conflicts of different scales have become almost the everyday phenomena in our parts of the world, thus putting the hope for peace at a farther distance.

We are of the belief that the rich deliberations over a period of three days must have furthered the understanding and debates on the tenets of democracy, development and peace and their interdependence. Nepal as a venue for this conference was selected because the Nepalese society has recently achieved marvelous progression in the path of democracy, negating the doctrine of feudalism-based monarchical system that ruled the country for more than 240 years, yielding nothing but huge burden to the people. However, Nepal has still a long way to go for institutionalising democracy, opening up the window of development and paving path for lasting peace. The contributions to this conference would help the Nepalese society to move in the right direction, and the positive learning could be replicated to other societies, we think. The synopsis of the conference in the form of this proceeding is in your hands, which would be a starting point for debates in days to come.
We would like to thank all the delegates, panelists and the guest speakers - Prof. Samir Amin, Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', Ex-deputy Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Constituent Assembly Members Dr. Narayan Khadka and Ms. Sarita Giri, among others, who provided huge amount of inputs to the conference. Last but not the least, the secretariat members of the conference - Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka, Mr. Rajan Bhattarai, Dr. Netra Timsina, Ms. Sharmila Karki, Ms. Rachita Sharma, Ms. Prajeena Karmacharya, Mr. Som Rai, Mr. Yadab Katwal, Mr. Madan Karki, and all other staff of Rural Reconstruction Nepal (RRN) deserve special thanks for their untiring efforts to make this event a grand success. Similarly, we would like to thank the local host groups without which this conference would have not been possible to be organised in the manner that we did. The editors - Sarba Raj Khadka, Mohiuddin Ahmad and Mukunda Kattel, and the rapporteurs are also duly acknowledged for their incredible works. We very much value the feedbacks from the readers of this proceeding, hence, we request to feel free passing your feelings to further improve such publications in future.

Thank you all,

- South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE)
- Korea Democracy Foundation (KDF)
- LDC Watch
- Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives (ARENA)
## ACRONYMS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Accra Agenda for Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANFREL</td>
<td>Asian Network for Free Elections</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANPFa</td>
<td>All Nepal Peasants Federation</td>
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<td>ARENA</td>
<td>Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives</td>
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<td>ARF</td>
<td>Asian Resource Foundation</td>
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<td>BPoA</td>
<td>Brussels Programme of Action</td>
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<td>CA</td>
<td>Constituent Assembly</td>
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<td>CEPAD</td>
<td>Centre of Studies for Peace and Development</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>Comprehensive Peace Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPN (M)</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist)</td>
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<td>CPN (UML)</td>
<td>Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist)</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<td>DEMOS</td>
<td>Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies</td>
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<td>DNF</td>
<td>Dalit NGO Federation of Nepal</td>
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<td>DYB</td>
<td>Democratic Youth of Bhutan</td>
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<td>FECOFUN</td>
<td>Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal</td>
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<td>FUNCINPEC</td>
<td>National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Cooperative Cambodia</td>
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<td>FEDWASAUN</td>
<td>Federation of Drinking Water and Sanitation Users Nepal</td>
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<td>HR Alliance</td>
<td>National Alliance for Human Rights and Social Justice, Nepal</td>
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<td>IFI</td>
<td>International Financial Institution</td>
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<td>IMADR</td>
<td>International Movement Against all forms of Discrimination and Racism</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>JNU</td>
<td>Jawaharlal Nehru University</td>
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<td>KDF</td>
<td>Korea Democracy Foundation</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDC Watch</td>
<td>Least Developed Countries Watch</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<td>MDL</td>
<td>Mothers and Daughters of Lanka</td>
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<td>NC</td>
<td>Nepali Congress</td>
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<td>NFDN</td>
<td>National Federation of Disabled Nepal</td>
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<td>NFN</td>
<td>NGO Federation of Nepal</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<td>NHRC</td>
<td>National Human Rights Commission</td>
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<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>Paris Declaration</td>
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<td>PLA</td>
<td>People's Liberation Army</td>
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<td>RRN</td>
<td>Rural Reconstruction Nepal</td>
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<td>SAAPE</td>
<td>South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication</td>
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<td>SDO</td>
<td>Sanayee Development Foundation</td>
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<td>SEA</td>
<td>South East Asia</td>
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<td>SPA</td>
<td>Seven Party Alliance</td>
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<td>TNC</td>
<td>Trans-national Corporation</td>
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<td>TU</td>
<td>Tribhuvan University</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Democracy, development and peace are interlinked. Any of these cannot be critiqued or made operative independently. A genuine democracy provides a platform for the people from all walks of life, class and faith to come together as political equals, and make and implement decisions about matters affecting them and their communities. People are able to make choices, explore solution to problems they face and evolve strategies to implement them in their own ways. Once people are empowered to make decisions about issues that affect their lives and environment, the possibility of having fundamental disputes leading to conflicts diminish.

Where do Asian societies feature in this democracy-development-peace dynamics? What prevents Asian states and leaders from building a society where these three elements stand in unison with each other? Do civil societies and social movements have any particular role to play in the process? The conference on Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia held in Kathmandu on 10-12 November 2008 attempted to dwell on these pressing questions putting them in the socio-political context of the region.

Unlike two decades ago, when most Asian states were under various forms of authoritarian rule, the people of the region have now been able to enjoy political and civil rights to a greater extent. Democracy has increasingly become a preferred choice of governance in the region. However, this progress is limited mainly to procedural democracy, and is not matched by substantive practices. More often the arena of democratic polity has remained under firm control of minority political elite. The globalisation of capital under a neo-liberal framework has forced the rolling back of welfare programmes, hitherto promoted by social democracies or installed as a result of historical struggles, thereby causing deleterious effect on women, working population and other marginalised groups. The focus of democracy has now shifted from citizen to capital.

With the shrinking of the scope and space of democracy, most Asian societies are forced to bear the brunt of armed conflicts with catastrophic human and material consequences. Although appeared to be internal, most of these conflicts are not purely endogenous. They are often triggered and exacerbated by political decisions of the local
ruling elite in connivance with global actors and processes, such as neo-liberal value systems and aid regime. Continuation of conflicts provides them a good pretext to perpetuate control or to maintain status quo through a militarised state.

The locus of problem is not only the state. Almost all Asian societies suffer from structural violence of one form or another. To illustrate, the caste system, dominantly prevalent in India and Nepal, though not limited to these countries alone, divides the people into unequal and degrading hierarchies. The system allows the practice of untouchability despite legal prohibitions, which severely restricts vertical social mobility. The caste system has a strong influence on the formation of government and ruling mechanisms.

Religious chauvinists and extremists, who often go out of control in many parts of Asia and often take a violent course, divide people between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ They trigger vicious mayhems, in which people are maimed and killed. They bring disgrace and dishonour to women, and sometimes wipe out vulnerable communities in their entirety.

There is yet another problem that cuts across Asia. It is the division and disconnectedness amongst social movements. Many civil society organisations, who claim to be part of pro-people movements, are yet to rise to charges that they are remotely planted. There is crisis of confidence between political parties and civil society. These two rarely interact, let alone work together.

These problems do not stand without solutions. Our societies and networks have the courage to face them. What needs to be done immediately is to demystify some of conceptual confusions gnawing some of our minds and movements, intensify interactive collaboration among movements at various levels, and build synergies out of differences and diversities to tackle the obstacles facing us. Other urgencies include the following, at the very least.

(a) Redefine ‘democracy’ and promote it. In the global order of the day, ‘democracy’ does not connote people any more. Under the influence of neo-liberal value systems, the so-called democratic practices of the day bring myriad forms of indignities to the people rather than protecting their interests. This requires democracy to be redefined and re-imagined. This is where the term ‘alternative democracy’ or ‘genuine democracy’ or ‘true democracy’ comes into play.
What all these terms refer to is the democracy both as a process and mechanism. As a process, it enables all the people including the minorities to engage in political, economic, social and cultural processes as equals, and creates conditions for them to develop and harness potential fully. As a mechanism, it provides an institutional guarantee to all rights and freedoms available under the international law by taking all measures necessary, both legal and political. To build such a democracy requires (i) a strong institutional mechanism capable of regulating foreign and domestic capital, (ii) mass based political parties competent to provide leadership in the interest of the people (iii) independent judiciary; and (iv) independent and transparent civil society institutions including mass media promoting the interest of the people.

In a real democracy, the state is fully accountable to the people, and is always available to fulfil the people’s legitimate entitlements. And, there are watchdogs like mass media, NGOs, and so on to hold the bureaucracy and other public institutions accountable when they fail to perform their obligatory tasks.

(b) Create peace building infrastructure. There are multifarious problems of conflicts and wars; but the capacity to tackle them is low. In the first place, there is little awareness about the terms ‘conflict’ and ‘peace’. Conflicts may not necessarily be harmful. They may create opportunity to address the underlying inconsistencies and discords that create conflicts. In the same vein, peace is not only the absence of war and violence. It is an active process in which disputes and conflicts are addressed carefully in a framework of participatory democracy to produce constructive results.

Such a state of peace can be achieved. Popular education and awareness programmes play a central role in this respect. People need to be made aware that conflicts should be resolved and people should get mobilised towards peace-building. Equally important for building peace is the rule of law. Other important tools and mechanisms include institutional reform (reform of the bureaucracy and the security sector, for example, to make them sensitive to human rights, inclusiveness and gender justice), and equitable distribution of resources. The core issues here is to build social capacity (critical awareness and preparedness), as well as institutional capability to treat everyone equally, fairly and with dignity, and, thus, inculcate the culture of peace in all spheres of public life.
(c) Right to meaningful participation as human right. International human rights law provides for a number of universal human rights, ranging from civil and political to economic, social and cultural. Although broad and encompassing, the existing corpus of human rights does not include a fundamental right, which is the right to intervention in decision making. Currently, the right to participation is protected, and this right is believed to include the participation in decision making as well. However, this ‘implied’ right has not proved to be successful as people are often cheated in the name of participation. Therefore, there should be the codification and declaration of this new right enabling the people to intervene in decisions about all matters, big or small, that affect their lives and their environment. The international human rights law should mandate the states to protect, promote and fulfil this right, as it does in relation to other rights.
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Context

The closing decades of the twentieth century marked an unprecedented push towards political reform and democratisation in the Asia-Pacific region. In 1986, the Philippines experienced a popular uprising against the authoritarian Marcos regime. A year later in 1987, prolonged civil rights and political movements resulted in transitions from military rule to multi-party democracy in South Korea and Taiwan. Other instances of the move towards democratisation include the UN intervention in Cambodia in 1993, the fall of Indonesia’s Suharto regime in 1998 and recent reform efforts in Bhutan. The ongoing transition in Nepal following a decade-long violent conflict is perhaps the latest culmination of the region’s pursuit towards democracy and peace.

Alongside Japan and India that stand as the region’s long-standing representative democracies, a striking majority of states in the Asia-Pacific region form their governments through multi-party elections. As such, compared to the situation two decades ago, when most of these states were under authoritarian rule of one form or another, the people of the region are now in a better position to enjoy most of their political and civil rights. Democracy has increasingly become a preferred choice of governance in the region.

However, the progress in procedural democracy is not matched by substantive discourses and practices. The arena of democratic polity has remained under firm control of a handful of political elites. On the other hand globalisation of capital, coupled with a neo-liberal setting, has induced rolling back of welfare programmes, hitherto promoted either by social democracies or installed as a result of historical struggles, thereby causing deleterious effect on women, working population and other marginalised groups.

Recent glaring examples come from India, the largest functioning representative democracy in Asia, where the state is increasingly putting its weight behind big capital against its own people. The neo-liberal hegemony, now covered in the mantle of global war on terror,
and the consequent global environment of foul power play has given other democratic states a pretext to enact draconian laws, and be responsible for militarising both the states and the societies. In reality, democracy has become a charade. It is limited to elections, which are needed at certain intervals, to mask the internal degeneration of the substance of democracy itself. As in other regions, democracy in Asia is in crisis.

1.2 Existing Democracies

In order to arrive at an assessment of how existing democracies in Asia have fared, and also to re-examine and rediscover attempts and struggles to reconstitute democracy, it is of utmost importance to contextualise and discuss the socio-political system within which it is functioning.

A few facts need to be analysed in this respect. First, Asian political citizenship exists in a very unequal social order marred by caste hierarchies, ethnic or nationality-based divisions and patriarchy. These structural fault-lines shape political processes in a manner that reinforces the inequality that already exists at the society. Secondly, the focus of democracies is limited to the traditional notion of ‘nation building’. The existence of socio-cultural pluralities and diversities are undermined and neglected. Where neglect cannot remain a sustained option, efforts are made to homogenise people; often treating minority cultures (languages, religions and rituals) as the ‘other’. This modus operandi of democracy has often pitted the state against small nationalities and has been a cause for conflicts, some of which are violent and prolonged. Thirdly, the development model pursued, whether by authoritarian or democratic regimes, is top-down and exclusionary. It works only to benefit of a small section of the population, who, in most cases, serve the interest of global and big national capital, while leaving the vast majority of people homeless, helpless and deprived of a basic means of livelihood. The most deprived of the deprived – that goes without saying – are those who are already on the margin of society, namely the indigenous people, ethnic minorities and Dalits. Fourth, when faced with an internal challenge to a policy or direction, a common response by all states, irrespective of their nature, is a war cry. This has resulted in the increasing militarisation of the state.

The problem goes beyond the functioning of the state. Religious extremism, coupled with patriarchy, has a menacing effect on democracy, development and peace. Among others, such extremism
segregates people from one another and keeps them in hostile camps of ‘us’ and ‘them’, imposes various forms of violence against women and minorities, and promotes the culture of absolute obedience to irrational authority. Violence and injustices are deeply entrenched in norms and practices of Asian societies.

1.3 Conference on Democracy, Development and Peace

In this backdrop, LDC Watch, KDF, ARENA and SAAPE jointly organised a three-day conference on Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia in Kathmandu on 10 - 12 November 2008. The choice of Kathmandu as a venue was to show solidarity with Nepali people in their march towards the theme of the conference.

The conference took recent changes and challenges facing Nepal as a point of departure, but considered Asia as a whole for deliberation. This is because most Asian societies have similar socio-cultural-economic context, especially at the grassroots level.

1.4 Objectives

- To explore dialectical links between democracy, development and peace, and to find ways to promote them as complimentary components for sustainable peace, inclusive democracy and justice

- To look at development not only in terms of growth of GNP, or other conventional economic indicators, but rather in terms of human development and expansion of freedom, including capabilities to enjoy economic, social and cultural rights

- To explore ways to build people-friendly constitution and other socio-political instruments and structures

- To assess the idea and validity of Asian values

- To identify key challenges facing the democracy-civil society complexity in Asia and generate ideas to address them

- To identify key challenges to democratic and secular governance in transitional and consolidating democracies in Asia, and build responses to the challenges
1.5 Issues and Agenda

- Development, democratisation and peace
  a) Assessing the impact of economic development on
democratisation and vice versa
  b) Building democratic framework addressing social
structures that clash with basic tenets of democracy
  c) Promoting development as a key component of democracy
- Developing multiparty democracy and electoral process at local and
  national levels in the framework of economic and social justice
- Building common understanding of democratic transition in Nepal
- Democracy and secularism
  a) Promoting interaction between state and society to
  secularise both
  b) Making democracy work for all groups and communities,
  and not just for a dominant group or class
  c) Protecting the rights of the marginalised and the excluded
     through appropriate institutional arrangements
- Democracy and equity
  a) Promoting democratic governance in transitional and
     consolidating phases of democracies in Asia
  b) Promoting human rights for all
  c) Promoting critical engagement between civil society and
     political society for sustainable democracy, development
     and peace
- Judiciary and judicial responsibility, and its independence from the
  executive
- Local self-government
  a) Is local self-government possible without land reform?
  b) Financial powers in local self-government
- Militarisation
a) Global war on terror and its impact on development and democracy in Asia

1.6 Participants
The conference brought together experts, practitioners and representatives with organic links to various political parties and grassroots movements from different parts of Asia. The conference also brought together progressive intellectuals, civil society members, policy makers, parliamentarians, student leaders, trade unionists and representatives from various sections of the Nepali society, including women, Dalits and youths. Members of LDC Watch, ARENA, KDF and SAAPE constituted yet another category of participants.

1.7 The Conference Mechanics
The conference included thematic presentations by resource persons drawn from various fields of expertise, thematic workshops, roundtable discussions and plenary. The gist of presentations has been documented under relevant themes.

The conference reviewed, reflected and took stock of the knowledge, experiences and insights accumulated by various social movements; critiqued the impact of neo-liberal globalisation on people's social, political and economic spheres; and vowed to build an alternative democracy as the means to counteract the onslaught of hegemonic globalisation and tackle the root of intra-state disputes and conflicts facing Asian societies.

1.8 Setting the Tone
The tone of conference was set in the inaugural session held on 10 November 2008 at the City Hall in Kathmandu. Among the speakers were key political figures of Nepal, civil society leaders and representatives of the organisers of the conference. All the speakers expressed their resentment about the kind of governance that Asian states have under the neo-liberal regime and how to respond to the will of the people at the bottom and bring structural change in the art of governance. Their deliberations are summarised below.
Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, Prime Minister of Nepal and Chairperson of CPN (Maoist):

The ongoing formal parliamentary democracy and market-led neo-liberal economic policies in the guise of globalisation further marginalises the poor and the helpless. Its chain effects are having tremendous negative consequence on the countries of the south. Developed countries are now realising the drawbacks of complete deregulation of the financial sector and free-market economy, and that the viciousness of financial crisis, natural disaster and modern-day catastrophes like global warming and climate change are directly related to the capitalist world order. Democracy must ensure participation, representation, accountability, responsiveness and unity of people. In fact, these are the pillars of democracy that need to be institutionalised and sustained.

Present political transformation of Nepal over the past couple of years was not a cosmetic change, but a complete metamorphosis that swept away the tyrannical regime of entrenched feudalism and aristocracy. The oligarchy, the remnants of the defeated feudalist and the people who wanted to maintain status-quo will try to thwart the gains made possible by the heroic struggle of the people. The same spirit of heroic struggle of the highly conscious sovereign people of Nepal is believed to successfully abort such mischief from any quarters.

Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Former General Secretary of CPN (UML) and Former Deputy Prime Minister:

The neo-liberal economic regime cannot be a solution to sustainable development and durable peace. Very interestingly, now the developed countries are in a competition to embrace various aspects of socialism to save the global capitalism from collapse.

Nepal presently has six tasks in its hand, namely constitution writing, inclusion, restructuring of state, scientific land reforms, logical conclusion of peace process and improvement in governance. The greedy capitalism has proven to be producing temporary prosperity for a few but ultimately ending up in serious crisis. We are committed to ending the remnants of feudalism and discriminatory practices with the help of Marxism.
The parties should work in tandem to find an alternative to neo-liberalism, which has failed to address the problems of the poor. We are devoted to resolve the distributional conflict prevalent for centuries.

**Prof. Samir Amin, Political Economist:**

Since the imperialist system is not associated with social progress, it is losing its legitimacy and credibility in many places. The recent financial crisis is the result of capitalist economy, and the utilitarian system of the capitalism should end. Big economies, particularly the US, the UK and Japan, have hegemonic approach vis-à-vis global resources. The recent collapse of Wall Street is a tip of the iceberg, and the fall of capitalism is imminent.

**Prof. Babu Mathew, SAAPE:**

The world economic bodies like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank are suggesting neo-liberalism. But in Nepal, people have expressed their desire for an egalitarian democracy, as the country has now moved from feudal monarchy to pro-people democracy. The present mode of development has failed to develop those communities who needed it.

**Prof. Lee Jung Ok, Director of International Cooperation Centre at the Korea Democracy Foundation (KDF):**

Without peace and development, democracy cannot sustain, as democracy is fragile because of the lack of sustainable peace and development in the Asian region. I believe that democracy is the basic infrastructure to ensure human dignity and rights and that it is the real source of power for development and peace. The change the Nepal is undergoing is extremely encouraging.
Mr. Sarita Giri, CA member and President of Nepal Sadbhavana Party:

The politics of consensus should be promoted in Nepal for sustainable peace and development. Exclusion exists in the country not only on the basis of class, but also of gender. These issues must be dealt with utmost swiftness for the country to be able to move forward. Political parties are the major vehicle for democracy and there is a need to bring together various stakeholders and organise the people.

Dr. Narayan Khadka, Leader of Nepali Congress, and member of CA:

The institutionalisation of democracy is important to achieve sustainable peace and development. Ongoing conflicts in Asian nations and terrorism are major challenges for peace, democracy and development of the region. Food sovereignty, democracy, peace and stability in any country must go hand in hand. The roots of democracy have not yet penetrated the psychological milieu and are yet to give hope to the poor, deprived and socially excluded. It is absolutely crucial to find long term solutions that need to be internalised by every person.

Dr. Arjun Kumar Karki, President of LDC Watch:

The idea of organising this conference is to bring together activists, academicians and political leaders to talk on the issues of democracy, development and peace in Asia. Key issue in terms of political transition that the Asian countries are going through is about whether democracy is a journey or destination. I hope this conference would help initiate further debate and deliberations on means to strengthening democracy, development and peace in Asia.

1.9 Report

While the inaugural session set the tone, the participants exchanged their views and wisdom in several sessions in the three-day conference. It included presentation of papers, open discussion, extempore deliberations and anatomy of the current situation prevailing in the region. An attempt has been made to capture all these interventions in the following chapters.
Democracy in Asia has been synonymous to rhetoric. People keep on expecting and imagining without much success, as the system is designed and promoted to serve the interests of minority elite. Blindfolded by the ‘circle of certainty’ (and the narrowly defined roadmaps of their own), the power brokers hide the reality and subject the people to a culture of silence and sectarian perspectives and keep them docile.

The upper social stratum comprising the ruling elite and the oppressive class have appropriated democracy. They dominate politics, society, culture and economy by coercing people into submission to status quo, and also by instilling in the people the fear of change against so-called stability.

Globalisation of capital coupled with neo-liberalism has eroded the very essence of democracy everywhere, with widening gaps within and between nations, cultures and peoples. The rich are becoming richer and disproportionately powerful and the poor poorer and powerless. Globalisation, which can be traced back to the days of colonisation, is the newest episode in the history of dominance of the industrialised countries over the agrarian ones. And the domination continues unabated. Even today, when the current global food and energy crisis have left the less industrialised countries in serious crisis with the people severely hit, the trans-national corporations are profiting immensely, more than ever before.

The inaction of the middle-class, including the intellectuals, human rights defenders and civil society leaders, who tend to think of themselves as the custodian of the revolution and social transformation is also a setback to democratic culture. The middle class believes that it can guide the lower social strata in an ‘orderly revolution’. This prescriptive mentality is built on the trickle-down (or spin-off effect) theory that the rich becomes richer and has some positive effect on the poor as well. The middle-class has been able to mobilise the masses at the grassroots in the fight against authoritarianism, and on several occasions they have succeeded.
We should develop democracy among local actors. We would like to propose a middle power that links democratic powers in civil society with democratic powers of political parties. Therefore, there is a need for horizontal and vertical linkages.

- Mr. Anton Pradjesto, DEMOS, Indonesia

Voting system is important in democratic practices. But democracy means more than that. It is an active, conscious and responsible participation of the people in political, social, cultural, economic and ecological processes, from local communities to national, regional and global arena. The aim of such participation is to transform these processes for them according to their need. Real transformation can be achieved only by and with the people. Democracy is all about by the people and of the people. The tendency to prescribe democracy by treating people as passive objects must be discouraged. The word ‘for’ signifies a hierarchy and a kind of patron-client relationship where one is a provider and others are receivers. Electoral processes that fail to ensure conscious and responsible participation of the people at large become susceptible to rigging and criminalisation.

‘Health for All’ or ‘Education for All’ should have been as simple and straight as the meaning of these phrases. The governing strategy to materialise them should be holistic and integrated with political commitments and social and moral responsibilities of the concerned actors, namely the government (including politicians, planners and service providers), the UN system and the aid agencies. The people also have responsibilities.

Politics is the lifeblood of the people that determines and shapes all aspects of lives. It encompasses people and their environment. Politics, thus, is a common public good that demands collective ownership of the people on an equal footing. However in Asia, politics is under the control of the oppressive class, and is not within the reach of the people. The oppressive class not only controls politics, but is also out, through its agents, in the campaign and hype to depoliticise people. It is done to perpetuate monopoly and dominance of the ruling class in politics and governing structures.
The need of the day is to politicise the people at large and engage them in everyday politics so that it can be purified and spared of all trickeries, conspiracies, manipulations and deceptions of the exploiters. Only through massive mobilisations of the people at large can democracy be saved and made to work for the benefit of the poor and marginalised. It is not a small task, and facing up to it calls for a broad vision and concerted actions at various levels.

Disputes and conflicts cut across almost all Asian societies. Destruction and mayhem are inflicted on the people on an everyday basis. At the state level, chaos and lawlessness often replace the democratic order. Yet, there is not enough preparedness to address the root of the conflicts and handle them carefully. To tackle conflicts requires a solid understanding of their social dynamics, historical trends, temporal developments and immediate and long-term impacts. It also requires the understanding and realisation that conflicts also open up opportunities to create a just and democratic society by triggering a process of political, social, economic cultural and behavioural revolution or transformation. Conflicts challenge old institutions, old pattern of relationships and traditional way of life, and stimulate people to think of new alternatives. Conflicts, thus, give fresh impetus to development and progress in a new way, forcing the actors concerned to learn from their failures and shortcomings. All conflict-ridden societies should be aware of this fundamental dynamics and be prepared to handle them accordingly.

Another challenge to reckon with is the way the UN system operates. In its attempt to appease global power centres, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and other forces of capitalist globalisation, the UN system seems to drift away from the spirit of its founding charter. Working closely with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the World Bank (WB) and the International Monitory Fund (IMF), with the latter two institutions working in tandem with profit-making trans-national
corporations at the expense of the everyday need of the people, the UN system happens to promote anti-people agenda masked in the slogan of private-public partnership promoted by these pro-rich institutions. As such, the UN system has also been responsible for the increasing disparity between the industrialised (so-called developed) and agrarian (so-called underdeveloped) countries, between the privileged (so-called rich) and the disadvantaged (so-called poor) within every country, and for the increasing environmental degradation in every part of Asia and the world.

Patents and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) that these institutions have promoted have not only kept disadvantaged people and countries away from scientific information and technology, but also deprives them of their natural and social heritage. To the word’s dismay, robbing the people and local communities of the social and natural resources nurtured and protected by them, these institutions are acting like global policemen. A witness to all these, the UN has been handicapped by its own illusions.

The international aid regime is also part of the problem. Foreign aid hardly flows without adverse conditionality, and often the aid is used to subvert the sovereign rights and independence of the people, and to colonise their minds and intellectual assets. This culture of aid-dependency should change. Aid should be a token of friendship between the peoples of the donor and recipient countries in a framework of partnership, and not an instrument of domination and dependence. It is the time for us all to learn to respect one another. It is time to liberate ourselves, as well as our adversaries from divisive, derogatory and dehumanising thoughts and actions.
NEPAL: TRANSITION FROM CONFLICT TO PEACE

3.1 Problem in Perspective

Home to some 27 million people, Nepal has been a hierarchical society with the Hindu religion providing an overarching cultural ideology to the nation. Until the promulgation of the Interim Constitution of Nepal in January 2007, Hinduism was the state religion and Nepal was a Hindu state. This means, the exclusionary caste system that forms the bedrock of Hinduism in the consciousness of its followers not only had an official protection but also maintained a close nexus with the system of governance. As such, as in other hierarchical societies, those in the upper ladder of the caste hierarchy captured the positions of power and privilege leaving those in lower tiers discriminated, deprived and denied. Over the period, those in the bottom of the social hierarchy became socio-economically dependent on higher castes. Thus, the caste framework also contributed to the formation and divide of classes in which the high caste also became high class.

From its founding as a modern state in the late 1760s, Nepal has virtually been governed by a minority controlling a vast majority of the population through an unjust, unequal and inhuman system of social division (caste system). As such, the majority of the Nepali people have historically and systematically suffered from deprivation, marginalisation and want. The bulk of those to suffer are women. As per Hindu mythology, a woman does not have a separate identity, and can only be acknowledged in relation to a male close to her, for example, as a mother (of a son), wife (of a husband) and daughter (of a father).

All these resulted in a number of dependency structures. To illustrate, the so-called low caste became dependent on and subjected to the so-called high caste; women became dependent on a men; other religions and cultures became subjugated to one (Hindu religion); and the poor became subjugated to the rich. All these resulted in institutionalised disparities in the distribution of national resources, social services and the exercise of power. The Nepali state never tried to address these
inequalities in earnest, not only during authoritarian times, but also under the so-called democratic dispensation established in 1990. Rather, denial, discrimination, marginalisation and subjugation were allowed to continue.

Tapping into burgeoning grievances and frustrations of the people, the CPN (Maoist) launched an armed uprising in February 1996 presenting it as the only option left to do away with all existing unequal, unjust and divisive structures, institutions and practices. The conflict that lasted a decade resulted in the killing of nearly 14,000 persons, with majority being civilians, involuntary disappearance of over 1,000 persons, internal displacement of more than 200,000, and abduction of thousands of children for indoctrination and enlistment in the Maoist army. The use of torture became widespread. Other forms of violence included physical attack, violence against women and grabbing of land and property. Throughout the period of conflict, serious breach of human right went unabated.

Started from a few remote districts in the Mid-Western hills with impoverished home-made weapons, the uprising triggered by the Maoists was spread nationwide within five years with the use of

The twelve-point agreement between the seven party alliance and the Maoists was a historic milestone in the peace process of Nepal. It brought together the forces committed to change. And, NHRC played a vital role in all steps of the peace process.

Mr. Sushil Pyakurel
Former Member of NHRC
Is peace more important than justice? Is reparations more important than anything else? Does reconciliation mean “forget and forgive”? Does truth-seeking automatically lead to reconciliation? Does sharing of power heal the wounds of the past? Is it easy to convert the victors into violators? What if there is obvious threat of “back to war”?

Transitional justice would provide a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by conflict and untold sufferings, and a better future. It would build a condition for a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence. It would help break the culture of impunity to stabilise the nation-building and peace process, and prevent a repetition of gross violation of human rights and humanitarian law in the future. Transitional justice is for understanding but not for vengeance; for reparation but not for retaliation; and, for ‘ubuntu’ (a word in South African languages to mean ‘humanity’ or ‘friendliness’) but not for victimisation.

-Dr. Gopal Krishna Shiwakoti
Senior Human Rights Defender

sophisticated weapons, such as AK 47. In November 2001, a State of Emergency was declared and the army was mobilised to combat the Maoists. Then on, Nepal featured in the top of the list of countries with gross violation of human rights at the hands of both the state security forces and the Maoists. Amidst the escalating conflict and national crisis, the monarchy started to meddle in the political affairs violating the 1990 constitution, which provided a limited role for the monarchy. In October 2002, then King Gyanendra removed the sitting Prime Minister terming him inept to rule the country and appointed as many as three short-lived governments until he assumed absolute power on 1 February 2005 with the backing of the army. Gyanendra dissolved the parliament, the remaining symbol of procedural democracy, and suspended political parties.

With the King assuming direct executive power, the parliamentary political parties and the Maoists worked out an agreement, known as the 12-point agreement, in November 2005, committing themselves to, among others, ending the monarchy and finding a peaceful solution to the armed conflict. Six months later, the absolute monarchy was
abolished through the 19-day people’s movement in April 2006. Thus began Nepal’s transition to democracy.

3.2 The Road to Transition

Nine months after the 2006 April movement that ended the absolute monarchy and paved the way for a peaceful settlement to the armed conflict in November 2006, the CPN (Maoist) and the government of the day (which was a coalition formed by the parliamentary political parties) agreed to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). One of the key features of the CPA was the Maoists’ commitment to peaceful democratic politics and renouncement of armed resistance. Other features of the CPA included the parties’ commitment to progressive restructuring of the state to resolve the existing problems created and perpetuated by caste, class, regional disparity and so on, and subscribing to international human rights and humanitarian laws and principles and progressive political, economic and social transformation of the country.

Other principal features of the CPA were the provisions to elect a Constituent Assembly (CA) through which to write a new constitution, and address the human rights violations through the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The CPA provided grounds for the end of all vestiges of the 240-year old monarchy. With the CPA, Nepal formally entered the process of transition from a violent past to a peaceful future.

Taking the peace process a step further, the CPN (Maoist) and the government introduced the Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063 (2007) on 15 January 2007. The Constitution, unlike its predecessors, declared Nepal an inclusive and secular state, vested the sovereignty and state authority in the Nepali people. A few months later, an interim government was formed with the Maoists formally joining it. Then, as per the Constitutional provision, elections for the CA were held in April 2008. The CPN (Maoist) emerged as the largest party in the CA, and formed the government with support from another prominent left party, CPN (UML), and few other smaller political parties, including the recently constituted Madhesi Jana Adhikar Forum (MJAF).

Currently, in the second half of 2008, Nepal is undergoing an unprecedented transformation that can rarely be observed in the world. The peace process is moving forward with many challenges and has so far been peaceful.
3.3 Challenges Ahead

One of the principal challenges brought about by transition is the level of people’s expectation. People started believing that once the peace process starts following the end of the monarchy and cessation of the armed conflict, their problems would be addressed and expectations would be fulfilled. Failure to live up to some promises, some of which may not be achievable in the short run, has made political parties unable to garner people’s trust and confidence. This has a frustrating effect on the people, as can be seen in the form of strikes, demonstrations and blockades which take place almost on a daily basis.

Another challenge the country faces is the absence of strong political will to break the culture of violence and to address the issue of impunity. There has virtually been no move towards addressing human rights violations of the past, including the long-neglected issue of forced disappearances. Efforts for rehabilitation of the displaced persons with dignity are lacking. There is also absence of justice and just reparations to victims. Moreover the work of drafting a new constitution has not started yet.

A third challenge before the country is to deal with a dozen of armed groups operating along Tarai exploiting the weakness of the post-conflict state. These groups have been accused of extortion, abduction and murder of public officials and innocent citizens. But the government has failed to tackle this situation.

In a post-conflict context, transitional justice becomes crucial for restoration of damaged relationship between citizens and the state and promoting reconciliation. Unfortunately, no attempt has so far been initiated in this respect. As a result, the victims are feeling alienated and deceived, while some violators of the past have emerged as victors and peacemakers.

Yet another challenge emanates from increasing divisions and disagreements among the parties that are supposed to lead the peace process to a logical end.

To face these challenges requires, in the first place, a serious move towards transitional justice. Secondly, there should be a concerted effort on the part of the government and political parties to address the pressing problems facing the people and addressing their day to day needs. Thirdly, the rule of law should be restored at all costs. Fourthly, earnest initiatives should be started to implement the CPA.
The transition period is often painful, full of ups and downs and twists and turns. To lead the transition requires a courageous and visionary political leadership. People hope that such leadership will emerge.

### 3.4 The Role of Civil Society

In the transitions from authoritarianism to republicanism, as well as from violent conflict to peaceful politics, the role of civil society has become instrumental. After taking absolute control of the government by dismissing the elected parliament in 2005, then King Gyanendra adopted the tactics of suppressing political activities. For a considerable period of time, the parties could not function properly to mobilise the people against the tyranny of the King. It was apparent that the people were not happy with the political parties when they did not respond to the need of the time. Here, civil society organisations worked as link between the people and the political parties by facilitating interactions between them and helping them to come closer. As public demonstrations started to swell, civil society organisations acted as observers to peaceful rallies and demonstrations minutely documenting and disseminating any use of excessive force by the state. They acted as the buffer between armed security forces and peaceful demonstrators, while encouraging the latter not to give up until their freedoms and liberties are restored.

Similarly, in the midst of armed conflict, the civil society organisations consistently advocated the need for negotiated settlement and facilitated dialogue between the Maoists and other political parties. People were mobilised at the grassroots level against all forms of excesses and highhandedness. All forms of human rights violations were documented, shared widely, locally and globally, and voices and

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Nepal’s transition is marred by inconclusiveness and indecisiveness. The country is now at the crossroads with various groups bringing about numerous contradictions and pushing the nation into the path of conflict and instability. The politics of transition is quite challenging and painstaking, and needs courage and determination to tackle it.

*Prof. Rajan Pokharel*, Tribhuvan University, Nepal
actions were mobilised against the violations. The parties in conflict were constantly put under pressure to respect the fundamental principles of human rights.

All these created conditions for the parliamentary political parties to form the Seven Party Alliance (SPA) to fight against the monarchy. This also created grounds for the SPA and the Maoists to agree to the 12-point agreement which opened the door for the Maoists to join other political parties. Thus two streams of political quarters converged to form a united front against the monarchy.

The civil society organisations marched together with the people during the 19-day people’s movement. Thereafter, they played a crucial role in getting all the parties to sign the CPA and implement it. During CA elections, they mobilised all their institutional strength to monitor the election as observers throughout the country. They have been continuing pressure on all political parties to work collectively and take the peace process to a logical conclusion. Nepal’s civil society organisations are an inseparable part of the country’s transitional process.

The fear that the new constitution will be a compromised document, like that of the 1990s that still prevails in Nepal. A compromise takes into account the concerns of those who have a voice and power, and neglects the sentiments of general mass.

Mr. Padma Ratna Tuladhar
Former Minister and Senior Human Rights Defender

The political change that we have seen recently in Nepal is home grown and indigenous.

- Mr. CK Lal, Political Columnist
Chapter 4

OVERVIEW OF COUNTRY EXPERIENCES

4.1 Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste is struggling to overcome complex challenges arising in its first few years of independence. Historically, the country was governed by traditional kings (Liu Rai) in a paternalistic system. After colonisation, the Portuguese set up a minimally centralised government while employing the Liu Rai to gain support from the people. The abrupt departure of the colonial system, coupled with the formation of political parties and the invasion of Indonesian forces, ended the rule of the Liu Rai. The country then came under Indonesian rule. In 1999, following 25 years of struggle for independence, Indonesian troops withdrew from the territory paving the way for political transition to democracy.

As democratic principles have begun to take root, the country is facing numerous challenges. State structures under the auspices of the United Nations are operating within a context of low capacity and inexperience to such structures. Power struggle among the leaders causes political instability and insecurity. All these hinder the country’s ability to function effectively. Furthermore, the divisions amongst the population along various political lines undermine the objective of democracy to represent the views of different groups and polarise communities at times of elections.

The power struggle and resultant political instability have hindered the path of socio-economic development making Timor-Leste a highly impoverished society. Few resources are available outside oil and gas revenue for the government to implement national development plans. The majority of the population continues to live in abject poverty with limited educational or occupational opportunities. There is increasing resentments towards those who are seen to be benefiting from state resources, and the people at large express huge disappointment and frustration with slow progress that has been achieved towards development and democracy in the post-independence era. Such disappointment and frustration only contribute to undermining the legitimacy of existing institutions.
The landscape of violence that has unfolded in the post-independence era in Timor-Leste has arisen in response to the unfulfilled expectations of what ‘independence’ would hold and the post-conflict challenges of an underdeveloped state run by divided leaders struggling for power and control but with no developed strategies for improving the lives of the people.

The primary challenge facing the country is to find ways in which both state and community resources can be best harnessed to benefit the future of the country in terms of peace and development.

- Mr. João Boavida, CEPAD, Timor Leste

The first few years of independence were troubled by repeated crises. The crisis in 2006 was the most serious one which nearly brought the country to the brink of a ‘failed-state’. All in all, it has been a tough challenge to lift Timor-Leste out of vulnerability and establish it as a self-reliant state.

Many people attribute the recurrent violence in the post-independence period and the weaknesses of political institutions to the short period of transition itself. The two-year UN supervised transition was too insufficient to put in place institutional structures necessary for conflict-ridden Timor-Leste. Also prevalence of a deteriorating situation in the context of the ‘culture of violence’ from which the country emerged is seen as a problem.

Inequalities are starkly evident in the society. Educational and economic stimulus through employment opportunities are the principal priorities of the people. However, these are very difficult to be realised. The low capacity of the teachers does not help to deliver education and the unpredictable security situation does not encourage people to invest in employment generation programmes. So the call for social justice, development and political stability has remained largely unaddressed.

The Programme of Research and Dialogue for Peace (PRDP) works in this challenging context attempting to address the deep divisions and mistrusts through a process of participatory action research and dialogue. The PRDP is being carried out in partnership between
Interpeace and the Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD), a new NGO that was established to host the programme. PRDP has developed countrywide processes of action-oriented dialogue designed to help break the cycle of violence and build a culture of peace. The approach is inclusive, politically impartial, participatory, and locally owned. The focus of PRDP is to identify the root cause of issues that may trigger tension and conflict and finding local solution to the problem. PRDP, thus, helps to address differences through constructive dialogue and encourages people to find local solutions to fundamental problems that may make or break the fragile peace.

There are conflicting perspectives on the state of democracy in Timor-Leste. Some people hold optimistically that the path being pursued is right. Another view suggests that structural conditions for deepening democracy are not yet ready. The latter view is that just to hold elections is not enough and democracy can only be meaningful after a certain stage is reached, for instance, after rule of law and good governance is achieved.

Whatever the views and perspectives, Timor-Leste has already adopted democracy as a political framework. This framework has facilitated peace in the country. Although there are some challenges and also dangers of communal segregations, democracy on the whole holds promises. Some attempts have already been made to craft democratic institutions sharing power between the parliament and the president. The multi-party system recognises independent candidates (having no affiliation with political parties) at local elections. There have also been some improvements in terms of management of democratic institutions. Some corrupt officials have already been brought to justice.

But a dark side is equally visible. The influence of ‘money politics’ is growing very strong. As money starts influencing politics, elections will not be free and fair; quality of representatives will be questionable and people’s freedom of choice will be distorted.

The state has not yet been able to deliver much. Even the basic rights of the people have not been fulfilled. There was notable progress in the freedom of the press, but now it has deteriorated. Indigenous values are not treated with respect despite their recognition by the state.

Political elites, including the “monsters”, are using democracy more for their personal gains than for the benefit of the people. They are
using the press to advocate their own beliefs. Public interest finds little reflection in the media. Democracy is being monopolised by those who have power and influence.

This dichotomy is present in the human rights sector as well. There has been some progress in terms of civil and political rights, but there are institutional weaknesses in promoting social and economic rights.

Pro-democracy actors have been politically marginalised and fragmented mainly due to the policies of the New Order regime. It also has problems of its own. It is narrowly focused and is not able to embrace larger issues affecting the people in general.

Social movements, which are expected to consolidate the process of democracy, are also having problems within themselves. They are concentrated on single issues and are not able to take up common issues. Their role in politics is very marginal.

As pro-democracy actors are fragmented and social movements are narrowly focused, there is a danger of democracy being an instrument of the elite to consolidate their vested interests unless decisive efforts are made to counteract the situation. For this, pro-democracy actors and institutions, civil society organisations and social movements should work together at all levels.

One of the major tasks for freeing democracy from the fold of the elite is to educate the people and engage them in political processes. This calls for voter education on a massive scale. Voter education should not limit to ‘how to vote’ but should also address ‘why’ and ‘what’. In the first place, voters have to be aware of the capabilities and the sense of accountability of the persons they are voting for.

The elite should not be allowed to decide the future of democracy in Timor-Leste.

Democracies: Procedural and Participatory

Procedural democracy can be characterised by its sole focus on electoralism, while participatory democracy goes beyond elections and takes into account the rights, interests, and perspectives of the people. Participatory democracy focuses on the participation of people and civil society organisations in political processes from the grassroots up to the national level.
4.2 India

Fundamental rights in the Indian constitution recognise only one economic right, the right to property. Other economic rights like the right to work, the right to means of livelihood, the right to leisure, a gender-just personal law for women, and the right to education for children do not constitute part of fundamental rights.

Secondly, India’s constitution puts bulk of the power with the union government, popularly known as the central government, although India is a federal state. In the list of powers, 99 are with the centre and 47 are with the states. Another 66 powers are concurrent. In that sense, India is quasi-federal. The word federalism does not appear anywhere in the Indian constitution.

In the beginning, under the influence of Jawaharlal Nehru and other social democrats, India went in for the substantial control of the state, what was called the public sector. Key heavy industries of iron, steel to machine tools were in the public sector.

India has not undertaken land reform on a nationwide scale. At the state level, there have been some efforts to land reform, first in Kashmir and later in West Bengal, Tripura and Kerala under the influence of the left. India’s capitalist farming has resulted in the development of rich peasantry, and the development of capitalist landlords.

Communalism has become a very dangerous problem since the 1960s. Religious sectarianism unleashed by the Hindu rightists committed genocide against the Muslims and Christians. The education system is highly inaccessible. Among children who enrol in primary schools, only ten percent reach college-level education. In specialised institutions, such as engineering, architecture and medicine, education has only benefited the upper caste and middle class. The lower class and other backward castes are left out of the education system.

However, the poor are aware of the value of their votes. This awareness is expressed in the anti-incumbency feeling, resulting in changes in the government every five years in most places with few exceptions. At the national level, the poor exercise their vote judiciously.

The most contradictory and unfortunate aspect of democracy in India is the increase in poverty, especially after the neo-liberal economic reforms of 1991. According to an official committee report, 77 percent of the Indians live on less than 60 cents per day. And 87 percent of the
rural population is below the official poverty line. In fact, there are two
India within India: the India of the lower middle class and working
class, and the one of upper middle class and the rich. So India is a
paradox in itself, with the most illiterate and the largest number of the
poor on the one hand and the largest number of the billionaires on the
other.

As the constitution does not guarantee economic rights to bulk of the
poor, India’s participatory democracy has turned out to be ritualistic.
With shifts in economics and economic entitlements, India has
pursued a pro-US foreign policy. With the Indo-US military framework
agreement of June 2005 and the Indo-US nuclear deal that took place
from 2005 to 2008, India has become a sub-imperialist power under
the US umbrella and a very close strategic ally of the USA.

Under the aegis of WTO agreements, the farmers have suffered a lot.
The extent of rural poverty is very high. Even many well off farmers,
who took up bio-technology cotton seeds and other cash crops, have
not been able to repay their loans. In this backdrop, the Maoist
movement has been revived. Out of India’s 600 districts, around 100
have a strong Maoist movement at the moment.

India would be a different place if there had been a right to work. The
Rural National Work Guarantee Act has guaranteed a partial right to
work. Under the Act, every rural family has a right to get a 100-day
employment package at minimum wage of at least Rs 80 per day. The
problem is that it is a 100-day employment for the whole family. In
rural India, almost each household has three or four adults. Yet, the
legislation gives at least a partial recognition of the right to work for
some 70 percent of the Indian population.
So where is India heading? In terms of foreign policy, India will get closer and closer to American. In terms of economy, increasing rural poverty has restricted domestic market and consequently restricted domestic demand. At a time when capitalism is under crisis and the so-called world market is shrinking, India will find itself in severe trouble. India’s inflation is already very high, which is as high as 13 percent in terms of consumer price index.

The Indian left is divided into 18 or 19 parties. The major stumbling block in the fight against the right is the divided left. They form election alliances, but they do not go to the people with a common and united vision and purpose. This is a serious shortcoming of the Indian politics.

4.3 Malaysia

Historically, Malaysia has been in the middle of the trading route, and has a very mixed demography. Economically, the country has become trade dependent. Nearly 70 percent of GDP is trade-based. As such, it is a country highly sensitive to any global change, including economic crisis. While the economic system it pursues is modern, politically it is a repressive regime.

Despite a number of elections held in the country, there is no real democracy. As per the constitution, the sovereignty of Malaysia is vested in the ethnic people. It means the parties representing indigenous people will always be in power, and so has been the trend over last 50 years. Malaysian experience suggests that electoral systems and participatory democracy are two different things.

The Asian financial meltdown that began 10 years ago from Thailand and Indonesia gave rise to the first wave of political awakening which forced regime changes in Indonesia, Korea and Thailand triggering some form of liberal democracy. But this did not influence Malaysian politics despite the economic crisis surging through the region.

Hit by the economic crises, the elite had to find a scapegoat. So they blamed international capitalism, Jewish conspiracy and imperialism. Other groups that were reform oriented were of the view that the core problem was within, which included corruption, lack of transparency, and so on.

Despite all these, the current regime was able to keep itself in power through the ethnicisation of politics and the monopoly of powers based
on ethnic groupings. The country promotes ethnicity-based programmes and policies, both in education and economic sectors. It is mandatory that universities provide 60 percent quota for indigenous people. Similarly, there is an economic policy providing that capital should be owned by the indigenous people. Every company aspiring to register their business must give 20 percent of its share to indigenous people.

But these policies have not benefited the poor indigenous people in rural areas. In the name of quota system, the policies have rather created various groups of elite in the economy.

Malaysia has one of the most repressive laws of the region controlling the media and freedom of expression. The private media is owned by the ruling parties. People are prevented by law from taking to the streets. There is an internal security law that allows the government to arrest people on various charges and detain them indefinitely.

To fight the political highhandedness and repression unleashed by the ruling elites, broad coalitions have been formed of people belonging to various social movements. In this context, the People’s Justice Party, a centrist political party, was formed in 2003 by a merger of the National Justice Party and the older Malaysian People's Party. The Party was initially led by Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, until the five-year political ban on former Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim was lifted in April 2008. The Party promotes a political agenda with especial emphasis on social justice and anti-corruption. Recently the Party has adopted a policy that seeks to abolish the dominant New Economic

Civil societies have, throughout the process of democratisation, played the role of the advocates or the conscience builders. But they have not been able to act as the mobiliser of the masses, nor have been able to establish direct links with the masses. The civil society is always putting forth their demands to the ruling parties. They have not come up with possible solutions or possible institutions to resolve some of the demands. Now, it is necessary to bring in concrete solutions, particularly to address the marginalisation of our societies. This is the challenge for democracy to be meaningful.

- Mr. Tian Chua, People’s Justice Party, Malaysia
Policy and replace it with one that emphasises non-ethnic approach to poverty eradication and correction of economic imbalances.

In the 2008 elections, the People’s Justice Party won 31 seats in the Parliament. Other opposition parties, namely the DAP and PAS, also made substantial gains with 28 and 23 seats respectively. In total, the opposition took 82 seats out of 222 denying the ruling Barisan Nasional party the two-thirds majority required to make constitutional changes in the Dewan Rakyat. In the history of Malaysia, it was the first time the opposition performed so well in elections.

The leaders of these opposition parties have proposed to consolidate their cooperation by forming Pakatan Rakyat. As per the modus operandi of cooperation, Pakatan Rakyat is to be led collectively by the three parties in such a way that would uphold the rights and interests of all Malaysians. The state governments of Kelantan, Kedah, Penang, Perak and Selangor would also be known as Pakatan Rakyat state governments.

4.4 Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a mountainous land-locked country located in Central Asia, with a history and culture that goes back over 5000 years. The exact population of Afghanistan is unknown. However, it is estimated to be somewhere close to 32 million.

The first step towards reforming the state of Afghanistan began with the Bonn Agreement in 2001. All anti-Taliban factions came together for the trial-period administration, and the Loyla Jirga led the transitional government for two years in 2001-2002. Another major step forward was the endorsement of the Afghan constitution in 2004. The same year, presidential elections were held with a huge participation of the people. Then in 2005, parliamentary and provincial elections were held establishing respectively a 230-member parliament and provincial governments to look over government activities and development plans.

Another part of the democratic process in Afghanistan was the emergence of different ten political parties. However, the overall process of democracy has been a top-down one, and is heavily influenced by external forces. People hugely participated in elections but there has not been any real effort to orient them on post-election business. In a word, what Afghani has is a symbolic democracy.
One of the main challenges now is security. It is getting worse in all parts of the country, especially in the west and south where the government control is in less than 30 percent of the area. The rest of the area is under the control of anti-government forces. The daily social life of the people there is heavily constrained by road attacks and suicide attacks, and counter operations of the military. This has severely affected reconstruction and development processes. The non-government organisations have not been able to reach the areas where assistance is needed.

Another challenge emerges from the way US- and NATO-led forces have been operating. Their military operations have caused numerous casualties among the civilians fomenting people’s mistrust and resentment towards the government and the international community. The other challenge emanates from the weak governance system. Corruption is rampant in all government departments, especially in the judiciary and the police. People often prefer not to refer their cases to the judiciary, because the process is lengthy and corrupt. The cases are, instead, presented to locally formed councils. What all these suggest is that the government has lost the trust of the people.

The Afghan democracy is under the undue influence of the warlords. They have a huge presence in the parliament and in all government departments both at the centre and in the provinces. They influence all decisions regarding development processes and priorities.

Amidst all these challenges, Afghanistan is now preparing for its second presidential election scheduled in June 2009.

Since 2005 most funding has been channelled through government programmes as per the Afghan development strategy, 2005. However, the capacity of the government is low to deal with development challenges and lead the process. The involvement of the military in development activities has affected the neutrality of the development process.

Agriculture and irrigation is the core of the livelihood of the majority of the people. But there are no programmes to develop these sectors. Afghan society is in need of tremendous change.

- Mr. Abdul Khaliq Stanikzai, SDO, Afghanistan
4.5 Cambodia

A country that shares border with Vietnam, Laos and Thailand, Cambodia got its independence from France in 1953 and became a Republic in 1968. Soon after, it got involved in the civil war. In 1979, it suffered Vietnamese invasion. The period of the 1960s and 70s were characterised by war, violence and terror. During the times of Khmer Rouge and the socialist party, even religious institutions were destroyed.

On the backdrop of the tormented and tortuous past, the United Nations organised an election in Cambodia in 1993. During the first election, there were four main political parties and three parties contested. FUNCINPEC won the election, but was not able to rule singly because of the protest from the CPP party, which was in power before the election, and wanted its share in the new government despite losing the elections. The king facilitated an agreement between the two parties and helped them form the government on the basis of shared leadership. Thus began the practice of co-premiership. But it did not work well. The concept of shared leadership was limited to the national level and could not reach the grassroots.

The second election was organised in 1998, and the third in 2003. In both elections, there was a lot of vote buying. Media was tightly controlled. After each election, there was a crisis because the results were questioned. In 2008, the ruling party massively manipulated the voter list. Cambodian elections have never been free and fair.

On a positive side, Cambodia has enjoyed the growth of civil society organisations, crossing over 2000 in 2008. Several networks are operating at the national level. Cambodian CSOs do not get involved in politics. This year discussions were initiated among them to see whether this position could be revised. But they concluded that it was still risky to get involved in political issues, which would mean to speak against the ruling party, and doing so might see the end of the CSO movement in Cambodia. Therefore they decided not to change their position.

The government has recently declared that it would soon introduce an NGO law. This has made many CSOs and NGOs very nervous. They fear government interference in their functioning. Most of Cambodian CSOs depend on foreign donors.

Cambodian government does not seem sensitive to human rights. According to a recent report, the country is controlled by one man, and
The legacy of war destroyed the socio-economic infrastructure in Cambodia. So, everything had to be built up from the ground. Even though there did exist some resemblances of democratic institutions, they did not function in reality. As the culture of the survival of the fittest set in, people did whatever was necessary to win, and survive.

- Ms. Thida C. Khus, SILAKA, Cambodia

The system is not organised to uphold human rights. These remarks made the prime minister very upset, but could not influence him to work for human rights. With regards to the rights of women and children, the government is open and is willing to work. But it is sceptic about human rights in general.

When it comes to gender justice, some serious efforts are underway to push gender mainstreaming into country policies and programmes. The Women’s Ministry is engaged in this task. Currently, all provincial and district governments have women as deputy governors. Cambodia elected a woman deputy prime minister in 2008 elections.

The key challenge facing Cambodia is the culture of impunity. The Khmer Rouge trial is going painfully slow. Other challenges centre round strengthening democratic institutions, transforming people’s mindset from paternalistic to democratic, organising the mass, and getting opposition parties to work together. Also challenging is getting the elected candidates to work across the party line for the good of the country. The CSOs should also change their mode of operation and cease being confrontational.

4.6 Bhutan

There are three major ethnic groups in Bhutan. They are pitted against each other by the ruling elites, dividing Bhutan along ethnic lines. Taking into confidence the 25 percent of the eastern population, the regime has completely sidelined some 40 percent of the people. Bhutan is the only country in the world to generate the largest number of refugee population. The ethnicisation of the state is a menace to democratic transition in Bhutan.
When people are not able to talk against the policies of the government, how can there be a truly functioning of democracy? Merely holding election is a farce, and not a process of democracy.

There is some hope with the new king in power, but I am concerned about radicalisation of the army by the king’s brother. Now, they want to enlist one ethnic group into the army, which will only obstruct the reconciliation process.

- Mr. Mohan Tamang, DYB, Bhutan

The voices of the 40 percent of the population have not been incorporated in the constitution of Bhutan although dramatic efforts were made to hold consultations across the country. India was also acting as an advisor in the law department. But it also could give no hope to the 40 percent of the population.

There needs to be a strong opposition to uphold the essence of democracy. But Bhutan is undergoing a calculated transition in which the people in power are setting up political parties. The two parties formed recently are headed by the present king’s uncle and one of the aides of the former king, respectively.

The civil societies and political parties who fought for change are banned in the country. Bhutan’s king is absolute and speaking against the king amounts to anti-national. People are not allowed to speak against the country’s policy. The civil society is non-existent, except for one that advocates for environment.

As democracy is the fundamental basis and essence of development, pro-democracy actors have been lobbying international community for making democracy a pre-condition for extending any aid to Bhutan.

4.7 Pakistan

Pakistan has become a theatre where the US army, supported by its local ally, is physically present and is staging a ‘war against terror’. Pakistan is also in the news because of the recent movements for the restoration of constitutional democracy.

People had high hopes pinned to the recently held elections. As such, the people voted for the mainstream political parties, which were
thrown for long in the opposition by the erstwhile military regime. But the people’s hopes were soon dampened as soon as the elections were over. The commitments made even in the superstructure level with regard to the restoration of the judiciary have not been accepted or adhered to. The ruling Pakistan’s People Party (PPP) discarded its own public commitments and agreements.

There have been several elections in Pakistan and as many military takeovers and martial laws. The army has not only become a critical player in the administration, it has also become a great stakeholder of the economy. It has built a corporate economy of its own in the name of welfare of the armed forces. It runs about 30 percent of the corporate sector including banks and insurance companies, and eats up substantial portion of national budget. In addition, army Generals control large chunks of agricultural land, thereby creating a rural military aristocracy.

Pakistan is a feudal state with almost 60 percent of the population living under the agrarian system controlled by feudal lords. The involvement of the army in almost all walks of social life has militarised both the state and society.

A major challenge Pakistan is facing currently is to bring the army under the civilian control, and keep it away from everyday socio-economic and political life of the state and society. Another challenge is to change the basic structure of the agrarian society. Some three percent landlords own about 48 percent of the land in the country, and control the entire populace living in rural areas, where the rule of law

There can be no democracy unless it is directly linked with the social and economic issues facing the people living under the shadow of the feudal structure. Real democracy will be one that will break the elitist control of society, transform the religious mindset, and free the people of the security state syndrome. Merely holding elections will have no meaning. We have had many elections but have sensed no change.

Making democracy work is a formidable task. Because, repeated military takeovers have paralysed all institutions.

- Mr. Abid Hasan Minto, National Workers Party, Pakistan
does not operate irrespective of what is written in the constitution. Customs and cultures heavily dominate the rural life in a manner that reinforces the interests and priorities of those who own the land and, as a result, wield power.

The third challenge grappling Pakistan is terrorism, militancy and religious extremism. There is a long-drawn conflict with India, which is predominantly a Hindu state. This is basically an extremist-promoted conflict, and there are extremist groups that keep the conflict with India alive. The India-Pakistan conflict has resulted in the persistence of a security state syndrome, one that creates grounds for the ascendancy of the armed forces. Pakistan has also been used as a springboard for tackling the situation of Afghanistan.

4.8 Myanmar

Myanmar’s diverse population has played a major role in defining its politics, history and demography. The country continues to struggle to mend its ethnic tensions. Myanmar has an authoritarian dictatorial regime which is controlled by the military in the form of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). A parliamentary election was held in 1990, but the military prevented the winning party to form a government. People are in favour of democracy, and have been fighting for it, but democracy is not allowed to be operative in Myanmar.

There is general agreement that the military rule in Myanmar is one of the world’s most repressive and abusive regimes. Military officers hold all cabinet positions and top posts in all ministries. Corruption is reportedly rampant at all levels. The Freedom in the World 2004 report by Freedom House notes that the junta rules by decree, controls the judiciary, suppresses all basic rights, and commits human rights abuses with impunity.

There is little hope that the situation would improve soon in Myanmar because of the various restraints enforced by the government upon the people.

- Mr. Chit Ko Ko Oo, ARF, Myanmar
Myanmar is the textbook example of a police state. Government informants and spies are omnipresent. People are afraid to speak to foreigners except in the most superficial of manners for fear of being hauled for questioning or worse. There is no freedom of speech, assembly or association.

4.9 Discussion and Synthesis

Following were some of the major points raised and discussed when the floor was opened for discussion:

- All necessary ingredients exist in many Asian countries for real democracy to grow. These countries have a long history of popular movements and have democratic blocks inclined to equity-based development. What the blocks should do is to integrate the vast majority of the peasants in the movement and redefine democracy from the people’s perspective.

- Studies have revealed that 7 to 10 percent of the people in less industrialised Asian countries are disabled or vulnerable in one form or other, but their issues are not raised in any of the presentations. People with disability are sidelined from the mainstream of development and democracy.

- Despite all limitations, the conduct of elections should be taken as a step towards democratisation of any society.

- When the people have economic, social and cultural rights and do not have civil and political rights, or vice versa, they have in fact nothing.

- It is important to organise the whole debate on democracy in the context of imperialist globalisation and neo-liberalism.

- For a multi-ethnic state, there is no other alternative to federalism to devolve power, decentralise authority and make democracy participatory and meaningful.
In recent years, wars, conflicts and internal strife have been tearing nations apart. Governments in many cases are too weak, irresponsible, inept or corrupt to address the root causes of the trouble, and have no ability to restore peace and harmony. In fact, many governments create conflicts to mask their failures and hide their misdeeds.

Since the 1990s, there has been an increased realisation of the importance of conflict resolution or management. It has also been recognised that prevention of a war is far more desirable and sensible, in terms of repercussions on families, institutions and societies, than tackling its costs. Although some work has been initiated towards these ends, it has not been formalised by any nation state, as governments are reluctant to acknowledge their own roles, either passive or aggressive, in fermenting violent conflict in their own spheres.

Conflict prevention should basically encompass two sets of interrelated activities. One is "operational prevention" which takes the measures to prevent ongoing armed conflict from further worsening. Another is "structural prevention" which addresses the root or structural condition that creates and catalyses conflicts. So, structural prevention focuses on steps, both in terms of policies and actions, to end inequalities and promote and protect fundamental human rights of all sections of society.

The root of conflict can be traced to socio-economic inequities, ethnic and religious discriminations, violations of human rights, disputes over land, unequal resource allocation and deprivation of political participation. Effective conflict prevention, which is absolutely essential for sustainable peace, development and for general wellbeing of a nation, requires concrete actions to address the roots of the problems as mentioned above. But there has been little work towards prevention. Instead, the governments continue to follow fragmented and exclusionary policies both in political and socio-economic spheres, and, thus, widen inequalities further. Unless inequalities are removed, there will be no peace in the world.
Poverty is spoken of extensively and all governments have poverty eradication programmes. Yet, the policies taken by the governments do not take the poorest of the poor as the yardstick. They seem to serve the richest of the rich. The poor are found to be increasingly pushed out, left without even the basic right to livelihood and dignity. Poverty, coupled with absence of dignity, fuels conflict, as has happened in Nepal and India. In Pakistan, the poor are drawn to terrorism.

One of the essential requirements of prevention of conflict is development of a system that is responsive, on a day to day basis, to the concerns and grievances of the masses. Unless the governments become accountable and responsive to the needs of the people, conflicts will remain inseparable from the state and society.

Unfortunately, may governments in Asia are not pursuing this course of action. In the face of challenges, the first choice they make is the use of force in a brutal and authoritarian manner. It is often said that they may not have the capacity to deal with the challenges in a different way. Their choice of action is determined by their primary concern to remain in power unopposed. This concern takes them even to sponsor military action against those voicing genuine concerns, and apply all cynical method to divide the people and pit them against each other. Rather than trying to understand and deal with the reasons that force the people to rise against state policies and actions, the governments choose a course that perpetuates violence.

There are also instances of deliberate manipulations by governments and political parties of the sentiments of the people in their quest for power. Poverty, resentment and anger of deprivation and discrimination are used by the governments to turn the anger of a group against another. Even so-called advanced democracies, such as the United States, use such methods in the international context in the name of fighting terrorism and so on.
Armed strife and violent conflicts also emerge from governments who focus themselves on pandering foreign mentors and implementing economic and defence policies as dictated by the west. They create a gap with the people and alienate them from government policies. As huge portion of development budgets goes to serve the interest of the mentors, no resources are available for tackling domestic urgencies. Then it becomes obvious for unrests to grow, which the externally-controlled governments seek to control through draconian laws and using force. In such a scenario, conflicts become an everyday phenomenon.

In the region as a whole, democracy has become an exercise to perpetuate dynastic rule rather than a true expression of people’s will. The political leadership of the region does not seem interested in implementing and instituting systems that are democratic and accountable in the real sense of the term. The notion of the government “of the people, by the people and for the people” is being replaced by “of the leaders, by the leaders and for the leaders”.

5.1 Indonesia

Comprising over 17,000 islands, 500 of which have not even been named, Indonesia consists of distinct ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Following three and a half centuries of colonisation by the Dutch, Indonesia secured its independence after World War II. Its history has since been turbulent with challenges posed by natural disasters, corruption, separatism, efforts at democratisation, and periods of rapid economic changes.
Since the fall of General Suharto in 1998, a relatively open and liberal political and social environment has opened up in ending three decades of the closed New Order period. Indonesia has since been in a period of transition, an era called as the period of "reformasi" (reform in Indonesian). The reformasi is characterised by a greater freedom of speech in sharp contrast with the censorship of the New Order era. In the political sphere, this has led to a more open political debate. The news media promote political diversity. There are flowering cultural expressions promoting open and tolerant way of life.

The country is now facing its third general election, with the parliamentary election slated for April and presidential election for October of 2009. There is a constitutional guarantee of human rights, including the right to citizenship, freedom of association, freedom of press and religious freedom. The government has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). With the constitutional protection of the multi-party system, there are a number of political parties operating in the public sphere. The military that was the dominating force in the New Order has been ousted from the structure of the political system.

Other notable developments include the redistribution of taxes from natural resources and electoral reform. Previously the ratio of distribution was 70:30 between central and local governments. Currently, it is the opposite, with 30 percent accruing to the centre and 70 percent to local governments. Currently, Indonesia has the General Election Committee responsible for running both parliamentary and presidential elections, as opposed to the government managing all elections before the reformation. Despite all these positive developments, New order had been established to attack communism, and the New Order policies still continue in one form or another. Nonetheless, changes are taking place to transform the situation, and make Indonesia fully democratic. To trigger the pace of change, the pillars of democracy should be solidified by strengthening civil society and intensifying social movements.

Corruption and collective violence have remained the two most important challenges facing our civil society today.

Mr. Ahmad Suaedy, WAHID Institute, Indonesia
developments, much needs to be done to build capacity of the people to effectively participate in decision making processes and transform their thinking.

The current period has been characterised by a careful political balance between long established socio-political norms and several emerging forces in Indonesian society. These balancing acts have produced compromises between those backing greater democracy and civilian rule, and the interests of the still powerful military; between the growing force of Islamism and the desire to maintain a secular government; between demands for greater regional autonomy and supporters of the older centralised state; and between the economic ideologies and policies of neo-liberalism and those of the welfare state.

Indonesia today has also been shaped by a number of events and phenomena of global significance. Political and economic instability, social unrest, corruption, and terrorism have slowed the process of progress. Although relations among different religious and ethnic groups are largely harmonious, acute sectarian discontent and violence remain a major problem in some areas.

5.2 Sri Lanka

It was the denial of democracy in Sri Lanka that gave rise to the insurgency aimed at the separation of the north and the east. Initially, the demand was for a federal state. But it was blatantly denied forcing the Tamil speaking people in the east of the island to express otherwise. Some enlightened leaders among the Sinhalese majority did agree on some terms and conditions towards reconciliation, but the agreement was torn apart as soon as it was signed because of the

Right from the past, the issues of ethnic minorities have been sidetracked after the elections in Sri Lanka, even till this date. Democratisation has been a difficult process because of the patriarchal political system that we have had to deal with. As women’s visibility is low, the country is still struggling to ensure meaningful participation of women in the democratic processes.

- Dr. Nimalka Fernando
IMADR/MDL, Sri Lanka
strong chauvinist pressure applied from the southern part of the island.

The insurgency that commenced in the late 1960s, and grew as a major war of even the conventional pattern between insurgents and the state forces, has, in the last 30 years, been responsible for some 70,000 deaths and as many as 500,000 Tamils being internally and externally displaced.

Recently, after the new government has come to power, military operations have been intensified with promises to ‘liberate’ the territories, hold elections and devolve power. The eastern province has already been ‘occupied’. And the armed forces, buoyed by the success in the east, are pushing towards the north. However, the resistance is growing and the armed forces are not being able to seize the territories there easily as envisaged by the government.

In 1988, with the Indian intervention, an indo-Lanka agreement was brought about aimed at constitutional amendment by which devolution was to be worked out in the north and the east. But the provisions regarding the power over land and law and order have not yet devolved. The president has time and again said that the constitutional provisions will be fully implemented. But this has so far remained merely a promise, as was in the previous regimes. With the chauvinist forces putting up counter resistance in the south, even implementing the Indian model has become a problem.

Devolution of power has remained a formality and has not been carried out even though the provision exists in the constitution. It is absolutely necessary to mobilise the left and democratic forces to shake off the shackles of chauvinism that prevents the government from working democratically.

Violent conflict is the result of the absence of democracy. Bringing the nations within the framework of democracy would end all conflicts of the world. But perhaps that would not be possible without conflict itself. The level of critical consciousness of the people in any given society would determine the level of democracy.

- Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Sri Lanka

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There are contradictions within the government between the chauvinist forces that are supportive of the government, and the left and progressive democratic forces, who also happen to support the government. This kind of equation needs to be reset in order for the government to take a meaningful step towards some form of substantial implementation of the provisions of the constitution.

To talk of Sri Lankan conflict, one needs to put the Indian factor into perspective. The southern forces of India have always supported and sympathised with the Tamil struggle and even with the LTTE, although it has not been so pronounced. The LTTE mobilises support from all sources, including Indian factions and the Diaspora in order to get a breathing space in the ongoing conflict.

To see from the perspective of Tamil speaking people or other minorities, what Sri Lanka has now is a majoritarian democracy that denies rights and interests of the Tamils and other minority groups, forcing them to fight to seek justice for themselves.

Stating a political change cannot take place without violence would put an end to our imagination. A passive revolution is possible as some of the major revolutions of our times have gone through without shedding a drop of blood.

Democracy should not restrict itself to elections. Majoritarian democracy is equivalent to fascist democracy. A meaningful democracy, which we are in need of, should have the following five elements: people’s empowerment, guarantee of minority rights, guarantee of equality and justice to all on an equal footing, democratisation of all social relations, and dialectical relations between freedom from fear and freedom from want.

- Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, JNU, India
5.3 Discussion and Synthesis

- The main reason of conflict in almost all countries is the exclusion of certain groups of people or parties from the mainstream politics.

- Most conflict management apparatus are proposed externally. For them to be meaningful, they should come from within the nations and communities facing conflicts.

- The role of the marginalised groups including women and children remains very important in any peace building process. But such role has not been realised.

- Unless a critical mass is created from within to deal with conflict, prevention of conflict may not be possible.

- Conflict may be natural for a society to grow. The question is whether we have an institutional capacity to handle a conflict constructively. In this sense, prevention of conflict is something that is difficult to perceive.
Chapter 6

TOWARDS ALTERNATIVE DEMOCRACY: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

6.1 What is Alternative Democracy?

The existing democratic order is in crisis. It is confronting some fundamental questions that emerge from the way it is functioning. The questions centre round its contents, its social, political and legal boundaries, and its internal workings. An alternative democracy is likely to evolve by demystifying these questions.

The existing order of democracy is troubled with its own making. Basically, the order is exercised in two different social spaces. One is ‘an internal space of society’ where a particular political system is constituted, and the subject-positions of people are determined in an institutionalised order. The other is ‘a boundary’ constructed in order to prevent the stability of an internal mechanism from being affected by the interference of external forces. Whereas the former is maintained within the already consented rule, the latter is where power is exercised in order to sustain such an internal rule.

Establishing alternative democracy requires a critical analysis of the dialectic relationship among various social forces and processes, including the dynamics of civil society, state formation and nation building. Alternative democracy that we are talking about is built on people’s struggles, and gets refined and developed through an active process of popular mobilisation. We are not talking about a static form, but a flexible process that can have many models.

Building such democracy and making it work for the people also requires addressing strategic contradictions in a particular society. For example in India, it is the contradiction between the class system and democratic processes. The formation of an Indian class has its own unique feature. It is reinforced by the caste factor, which inherently fragments and compartmentalises the people along a hierarchical order of unequal power relations.

Another contradiction to be addressed is the conflict between victors and victims of democracy itself. For example, with the consolidation of democracy, some 40 million people have been displaced in India
because of dams, and so on) since 1951, while only 2.1 million have been rehabilitated. Two out of three Indians cannot afford essential medicines; one out of three children in Nepal and Pakistan are out of schools; 87 percent of Afghans have no access to clean water; and, 25 million people in Bangladesh are exposed to arsenic poisoning. All these countries claim to have democracies, with India boasting about the largest democracy in the world.

Alternative democracy is both a process and a mechanism. As a process, it enables all the people including the minorities to engage in political, economic, social and cultural processes as political equals, and creates conditions for them to develop and harness their potential fully. As a mechanism, it provides an institutional guarantee to all freedoms and liberties available under the international law by taking all measures necessary, both legal and political. To build such a democracy requires (a) a strong institutional mechanism capable of regulating foreign and domestic capital, (b) mass based political

Caste was never static and is a very important issue that needs socialistic dealing.

- Prof. Ram Bapat, India
parties competent to provide leadership in the interest of the people (c) independent judiciary; and (d) independent and transparent civil society institutions including media, promoting the interests of the people.

In such democracy, the state is fully accountable to the people, and is always available to fulfil people’s legitimate entitlements. And there are agents of accountability (media, NGOs, and so on) to hold the bureaucracy and other public institutions accountable when they fail to fulfil their obligations to the people.

6.2 Country Situation

6.2.1 The Philippines

Democratisation, both as a term and a process, remains contested in the context of the Philippines. In the mainstream literature, it is defined as fulfilling certain procedural aspects of liberal democracy. This definition equates democracy with existence of free and fair elections, combined with civil and political liberties, and restoration of formal political institutions from authoritarian control. However, democracy is more than this. It is the creation, extension and practice of citizenship throughout a particular national territory. Genuine democracy requires popular consent, popular participation, accountability and practice of rights and tolerance.

The Philippine democracy is of the first kind that started to build with the people power that caused the downfall of the Marcos dictatorship. Political institutions have been restored after Marcos, but these institutions are still struggling to consolidate themselves and operate with full political autonomy. While elections are conducted regularly, political stability remains elusive as the post-Marcos governments are faced with political challenges from the military, rival political factions.

Trade unions express the tensions arising from class conflict and industrial dispute, and become revolutionary when face repression. But they become corporatist when confronted with socialist and economist decisions. At this time of turbulent global economy, trade unions need to advance and shape alternative development paradigms. They should re-imagine and renew their strengths and relevance as active agents of transformation of the working class.
and the civil society. Like the governments of the past, the present government also faces the crises of legitimacy with corruption charges, impeachment suits and military mutinies. Thus, the Philippine democracy has yet to add a substantive meaning to its procedural framework.

The trade union movement in the Philippines is perhaps the oldest in the region. It is seen as political in nature and as a movement towards emancipation. In the early 1900s, with the advent of the American colonialism, the Philippines trade union movement got fractured. The cleavages continue until today, especially in the form of two streams of unionism: economic unionism involved with the economic issues only and political nationalist trade unionism having political goals.

Despite the long history and experience of the Philippine trade union movement, it is getting weaker in the period of neo-liberal globalisation. To regain their strength and influence, the trade unions should extend their focus to social movements, and pursue the goal of far-reaching transformations of society through the mobilisation of masses. They should be able to exert political and economic influence. They should also be able to recognise and exploit the variations within the social movements, which are characterised by ‘old’ and ‘new’ trends. Old social movements emerged along class lines with strong political vision and agenda, while the new social movements have come about with theme/issue-focused mass mobilisations, such as the women’s movements, environmental movements, and human rights movements.

Trade unions and other movements, with their visions of a just and equitable society, need to participate in state building, nation building and crafting the development paradigm. These movements need to consolidate themselves and work to create a critical mass in order to practice democratisation.

Perhaps the unions need to redefine themselves as a working people and not as a working class. Trade unionism is a very viable vehicle for organising workers and politicising the masses for social transformation. The unions should also look at the role of women workers in terms of decision making.

- Ms. Verna Viajra, Philippines
6.2.2 South Korea

South Korea entered the transitory moment of democratisation in the late 1980, leaving behind the authoritarian military regime. But South Korea’s democratic forces are split and have been the cause for the revival of the civilised military regime legitimised by an electoral system.

Democratic Forces at a Loss in South Korea

Before the democratic transition, democratic forces took antagonistic attitude towards the conservative rightwing, which had the legacy of military dictatorship. However, back in power the democratic forces did not introduce any difference in the way they operated. Elites consolidated their influence, and democracy was limited to procedural rules. Worse, in the name of the Korea-US Military Alliance, a dangerous coalition was formed secretively.

In 1997, two events gave a great shock to South Korea. One was the change of the regime from the conservative ruling party to the liberal opposition party following Kim Dae-Jung, who was the political symbol of the democratic struggle against the military dictatorship, won the 16th presidential election. The other shock came from South Korea’s fall into the abyss of the neo-liberal globalisation after accepting monetary aid from the IMF to tackle Korean financial crisis, which was a part of the serious Asian economic crisis.

Then on, neo-liberal globalisation gradually deepened its influence with both ‘democratic’ regimes, namely the Kim Dae-Jung regime (1997 - 2001) and the Roh Moo-Hyun regime (2002 - 2007), letting

As alternative democracy, we should develop a practice of inclusion, and challenge the existing capital-centred democracy with radical views and values. The need of the day is to reveal the hidden agenda of repression and division being promoted in the neo-liberal order. Alternative democracy should promote the progressive logic of politics and radicalise the horizon of freedom and equality.

Dr. Seoungwon Lee
SKH University, South Korea
globalisation swipe. In particular, the Roh regime jumped fast on the global trend of neo-liberalism through various strategies, including business-friendly labour policy controlling both regular and irregular workforces. The regime also created other conditions for the intrusion of neo-liberalism in other areas as well. It changed ‘nationalism’ to ‘national security’, ‘welfare’ to ‘competition’ and ‘labour’ to ‘productivity’. With the Roh regime’s swinging attitude between democracy and neo-liberalism, a form of political nihilism has grown amongst South Koreans, and the focus of the word ‘democracy’ shifted from ‘citizen’ to ‘capital’.

This has resulted in the proliferation of a number of serious questions about democracy in South Korea. Of them, the following two are very important. Does democracy work unless the locus of power is replaced by radical forces? Does democracy provide any alternative logic of politics? What can be said of these two questions is that democracy remains meaningless if it does not change inequalities. And, democracy, in principle, challenges the political authority of the state, and opens up space for alternatives. But in practice, this has not happened so far.

**Democratisation in SEA**

Democratisation has become very problematic. The cluster countries including the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore are dealing with either low quality or pseudo democracies. Pseudo democracies are the countries where elections are regularly held but the conducts and results are, to a certain degree, rigged. There is a restrictive political space for opposition parties and civil society to mobilise. Low quality democracies, on the other hand, refer to partisan democracies characterised the manipulation of electoral exercises, including partisan use of state funds and facilities during elections, executive abuses of one kind or another, shadowy business relations, and judicial weaknesses that generate corruption and policy ineffectiveness.

**6.2.3 Bangladesh**

In the Bangladeshi context, the challenge facing democracy is to enable the people to reclaim their sovereignty. Enabling people in this sense requires the critical interrogation of the conventional notion of ‘sovereignty’. It should be seen in the global context in which nation states are reconfigured to serve the interest of global corporations.
Nationally, they are reduced to a security state to combat popular resistance coming from different oppressed classes. Bangladesh is a classic example of this paradox. In this context, it is becoming increasingly imperative that the democratic struggle of the peoples of Bangladesh is markedly shifted to the question of ‘sovereignty’. The peoples should build alliances of various movements and constitute themselves as an invincible peoples’ power that can challenge the existing power configuration created by imperialism through its alliance with pro-imperial and anti-democratic classes. Unless people are made sovereign, there is no other power to build and sustain democracy in its truest sense in Bangladesh.

On 11 January 2007, there was a military take over with an external civilian façade. Diplomats of imperial countries openly intervened, in blatant violation of the Vienna Convention, in the internal political affairs of the country justifying their actions by evoking the fear of ‘failed state’, ‘corruption’, ‘good governance’, ‘Islamic fundamentalism’, and ‘security’ to fit the project of the USA led ‘war against terrorism’ and culminated into the demand to install morally ‘honest’ and ‘non-corrupt’ politicians. The so called caretaker government that was formed after the military coup comprised technocrats and NGO leaders serving the World Bank directly or promoting projects of multilateral or bilateral agencies in a framework of neo-liberal policies.

Questions of economy, class and power have been reduced into moral imaginations. Political alliances have been formed amongst local embassies of imperialist countries, high ranking petty-bourgeois

For bourgeois political parties, democracy means elections. They do not take democracy as the people’s capacity to exert pressure. When we think of real democracy, we should talk about power in the hands of the people to fight imperialists.

Class analysis helps to form a political community where people belong to a particular form of new identity, which transcends other identities and focuses on a particular task of defeating imperialism.

- **Mr. Farahd Mazhar**, Bangladesh
military officers and their counterparts in the civil society and the media.

Imperialism has succeeded in grounding its hold through the new and powerful urban middle class, which is completely alienated from the masses. Politics is projected as essentially a corrupt game and politicians as corrupt. And, ‘good governance’ (by honest people) is advocated as the panacea to all the problems.

There have been sporadic popular resistances against imperialism, neo-liberalism and the current coup-emerged government. But they are not making any real impact as they are articulated through conventional discourses of popular sovereignty, and are fashioned as human rights and social justice movements.

Amidst all this, Bangladesh is heading towards elections slated for the end of December 2008. What is expected of the elections is the formation of a parliament providing a constitutional exit for the present unconstitutional regime. What is also possible is the parliament passing a bill providing indemnity to the present regime. The elections are not going to be any more than a farce.

In the absence of a political agency active on behalf of the people, as we have seen in Nepal, the immediate future of Bangladesh is not very bright. Bangladesh is in need of a democracy that takes into account the socio-economic formations of various classes in the present context of imperialism, war and neo-liberalism, and is able to address the systemic crisis inherent in the Bangladeshi society. To start building such a democracy requires us to address a few prior challenges. Foremost of them is the transformation of the Bangladeshi civil society movements into such social movements that consolidate ‘people’s power’ against the existing exploitative power of the state. The ongoing civil society movements are limited, and take on an institutionalised form. It is no denying that there is a section of the civil society that is seriously engaged in fighting neo-liberal policies, war and violence, and is firmly defending the issues of justice and equity. However, despite these positive contributions, we need to face the fact that the movements led by ‘civil society’ often disregard political organisations and de-politicise social movements. Lack of alliances among the forces that purport to work for and with the people is a challenge to meaningful democracy in Bangladesh.
6.2.4 Indonesia

One can easily blame neo-liberal forces for hijacking the reformation in Indonesia with which democracy building processes had begun. Leadership of any epoch is determined by a balance of various social forces, and the neo-liberal forces proved to be stronger in Indonesia. The failure of the popular movement to answer two of the most important questions, namely ‘what is to be done now’, and ‘what next’, provided grounds for neo-liberal forces to triumph in the wake of Suharto’s ousting by the sweat and blood of the people.

One of the most disappointing results of the so-called “reformation” is the chaos, mistrust and infighting amongst the elite circle of the movement. In the post-authoritarian era, many organisations split, leaving deeply debilitating impacts. Others resorted to expel members to quell internal oppositions. As the players of the popular movement started to tear, the neo-liberal forces gained grounds to consolidate themselves.

The experience of having to live under the dictatorship of the New Order, and to endure many splits and betrayals within the leadership of the movement that fought the New Order, reminded Indonesians of an old maxim that the liberation of working people must be the result of their own effort. As such, in 2004, the Working People’s Association was founded with a resolution to build political leadership out of the masses and mass organisations. The people’s leadership so built would take initiatives into their own hands and wage a struggle that would be, as far as possible, close to the line of class struggle. Thus, there are efforts to create a political organisation which is led and run by workers, peasants, fishermen, and urban poor themselves. Some would call it a “genuine workers’ party”; but we prefer to use a less ambitious terminology and call it a working people’s democracy. We don’t believe in the “intelligentsia” anymore. Instead, we struggle to create an army of the working people’s intelligent leaders.

The concept of the working people’s democracy works simply. It is the working people leading the nation through political organisations run by them. It is also the working people running the management of industry, and deciding the course of the country’s economic and social development. In accordance with the principle of ‘reliance on working people’s initiatives’, PRP encourages various political expressions and experiments aimed at helping the working people develop their capacity to lead. These experiments start from the very bottom of the rung and move upwards.
The workers in a factory called PT Istana in West Jakarta have formed a “Factory Occupation Council” which acts differently from any other “normal” union. The Council, led by PRP union members, is based on the models of people’s councils where a direct democracy is in full effect. In the near future, the Council will also have representatives from the neighbourhood so that the factory can also be a platform for broad social function. Though the Council was formed only a few months ago, the workers have already learned a lot about running a complex organisation. Currently, the Council is focused on making the production go smoothly, and fending off efforts from the owners to thwart the Council itself.

With this experiment, the aim is to extract a meaningful and crucial lesson as to how social relation of production should be changed, and how social ownership of the means of production should be built. Can a production process run without an owner or even without factory bureaucrats? Can a socially owned factory bring prosperity to its workers and neighbourhood? How can we build inter-factory connections when more factories have been occupied? Can this be a template for nationalisation of industries? These are some of the questions that we are putting to the test.

This experiment will not remain isolated or a lone experience. It will instead be built into a national movement of factory occupation uniting it with working people’s organisations. We will also try our best to unite scattered resistances to the neo-liberal onslaught. Doing so is a tall order. To date, every attempt of uniting various resistance movements has been thwarted, not always by the government and its

Being able to founded a national organisation virtually without foreign money, unlike those organisations of the 1980s and early 1990s, we are able to view Asia more strategically. There are untapped resources in Asia, and we share common experience of colonialism and neo-liberalism. There are also remnants of feudalism, even forms of slavery, in the fabric of Asian capitalism. We should focus on these aspects to build a closer tie among popular movements and shape our resistances accordingly.

- Mr. Ken Budha Kusumandaru, Indonesia
agencies, but almost always by bickering amongst the participants. But we will not give up, and will continue to try our best to form a single national committee of the diverse resistance movements and channel our synergy to face the impending economic crises. In addition, our movement will also be linked to international networks and alliances friendly to us. Without international support, we are aware that our local initiative has risks of dying out as it is too small to compete against the well-connected capitalist regime.

There has already been some initiation towards unification and alliance building with some powerful workers’ unions, including those in the government sector. The unification process will be led by a presidium comprised of prominent leaders of national working peoples’ organisations, and not by the intelligentsia. One of the tasks of the presidium will be to work as the national committee of the constituent members, and, as such, take policy decisions about all organisational matters, and open branches or regional committees in the whole country. The leaders of the national committee would exclusively be drawn from amongst the leaders of working people’s organisations.

Once functional, the national committee would act as a single powerful voice of the Indonesian working class – which is basically made up of the workers, peasants, urban poor and fishermen – against the impoverishment facing them, as the government seeks to bail out members of the ruling class hit by the present global economic crises. So, as the ruling class rallies behind the powerful apparatus of the government, the working masses will rally behind the national committee to resist any wave of assault on people’s rights. This will be an initiative by the people, led by their own leaders, who decide for their own good and act accordingly.

Once we are able to found a national movement of factory occupations, as has been envisaged, we shall have a different experience from what Latin American countries, such as Venezuela, have. Unlike in Latin America, we do not have state support. The general mood of the people is also in the ebb. They have yet to prepare themselves for another struggle after their energy was spent in the upheaval of 1997-98. The Indonesian working masses are confused by liberal democrats' propaganda of nationalism and protectionism, and there is no real demand for the change of social relation of productive forces.
6.3 Principal Challenges to Alternative Democracy: Lessons from Existing Practices

There are five key developments that are affecting existing form of democracy. First and most important of them is financial contagion and crisis gripping capitalism. The crisis is going to have impacts on market, trade and on our entire economies, which will ultimately impact the poor and the marginalised most acutely.

Second is the political and economic rise of China, which is completely focused on trade and economics to the extent they yield benefits. The country is bent on strengthening authoritarian governments throughout Asia.

Third, inter-religious and inter-ethnic tensions and violent clashes that occur all over Asia create obstacles to democracy. These tensions serve as a good pretext for authoritarian governments to remain in power. In some cases, even the governments encourage such tensions to grow so that they can justify the use of force to consolidate their power. These internal tensions also help imperialist powers grow stronger as national economies shrink and governments become completely dependent on external forces even on economic terms.

Fourth, it has been many years since most of our countries have achieved independence, and the promises made of freedom, equality and development. But in reality, the contrary has happened. As UN statistics show, our region is full of large pockets of poverty, rising inequality, rising debts, illiteracy, military expenditures way ahead of expenditures on education and health, and a very low gender development index. Women are on the margin of development processes. In this backdrop, what democracy means for the poor and the marginalised is a struggle day in and day out to arrange for their next meal.

Fifth, democracy has stalled and receded throughout the region. A survey by an economists’ intelligence unit in London estimates that out of 167 countries, 137 are falling behind in terms of democratic progress, and only 30 show the sign of progress. This shrinking progress of democracy has serious implications for all our societies.

6.3.1 Mitigating Measures

(a) In the backdrop of the above challenges, we, first, need to start talking about democracy as a variable in ourselves. We share some parts of it with liberals, the forces we consider our enemies. This
is because we come from the same social process. These values are needed for industrialisation and building of modern societies, and are necessary for modern productions to go on. The only thing needed is to be very meticulous, scientific, and clear about the things that we commonly share and seriously differ on.

(b) We need to critically revisit and review all the institutions that surround us: NGOs, political parties, grassroots organisations, and what we call civil society groups. We should also look into how these groups relate to each other, especially in terms of what roles each plays. None of them can claim monopolies of powers or to be the best process to develop the best alternatives. On the contrary, an alternative can be developed fostering alliances with groups of people with different ideologies and political agendas. We need to open up ourselves to continue to work to widen our networks and alliances. If we remain stuck on our political agenda, nobody will be willing to join us.

(c) Mobilisation of people via impromptu uprising is not enough. A movement needs to have a strong bargaining power with a strong membership base behind it. Only having a strong moral voice and decisive leaders cannot sustain us unless we are also strong in terms of membership. To expand the membership for the kind of movement that we are talking now, we should bring more than ideological education to the members we reach out. We should have a clear-cut policy and programme to address the everyday issues facing the class we seek to represent.

(d) It is necessary to maintain the dynamics in favour of our movement when contradictions among social forces deepen. As elites split with irreconcilable contradictions among themselves, we should be available to tap into the opportunity to create momentum in our favour.

(e) We should have capacity to deliver, especially after we come to power. We have a lot of things in our plates, and a lot many lofty and creative ideas as to how to exploit the things to benefit the people in need. They want simple things done quickly, those confronting them daily. We need to be accountable to them and be prompt and effective to address their demands. We should focus on creating or consolidating institutions and let them work independently.
6.4 Role of Civil Society

There are diverse views about the relationship between civil society and democracy. These views arise from how civil society is defined as a concept. There is a school of thought that sees civil society as a neo-liberal construct, created with a neo-liberal economic policy, with a carefully crafted strategy to intervene into the politics of the people. The aim of such intervention, this view holds, is to blunt people's power and make it unable to challenge the existing power of feudal, semi-feudal or other forms of authoritarian power in order to expand the sovereignty of the market through new class alliances and clear up the way for development determined by the logic of capital.

Another view of civil society is somewhat moderate. It sees civil societies as having both expanded and contracted democratic spaces. According this view, civil society may be necessary but is not a sufficient condition for the promotion and protection of democracy, because democracy is incumbent upon the state with its access to public budgets, official security apparatuses and the responsibility to uphold the rule of law.

There are also opinions that civil societies should be made to contribute to democracy as they are already an inseparable part of socio-political processes. Simply blaming, cursing and grumbling about the neo-liberalism do not take us anywhere. Alongside cursing, we should find ways to live with this. Therefore, the sooner we grapple with economic theories and understand capitalism in a very coherent manner, the more likely we are to find a way to navigate the challenges of our time.

Historical junctures and contexts for the democratisation process are different in different societies. So the roles or limitations of the civil society or the progressive or revolutionary subjects are all different. It is time to review and deepen our understanding of the impact of global forces or regional forces or private forces or the capitalist crisis on civil societies and social movements. The way we organise ourselves and the people, practice democracy in our own organisations and imagine who we are and accept the divergence of identities, require significant changes. Therefore, despite all diversities, it is time to map and sharpen the impact of global and regional forces on many issues familiar to us.

- Mr. Francis Dae-Hoon Lee, ARENA, Korea
manner, the easier it becomes for us to engage with the states that are grappling with the same. What is important here is to make civil societies work for the people and engage them in democratisation processes. A few suggestions are made in this respect.

(a) It is important that civil society listens to the people, especially the poor and the marginalised. Many civil society groups in Asia do not listen to the people. Instead, through their small or large structures, they tell the people how they should live their lives. This is not acceptable. Civil society should not prescribe ideas only. Rather, they should facilitate the people to get organised, and help them articulate their ideas.

(b) Civil society should broaden its base so that those in power have to listen to the issues being raised. An entity with a limited base does not appeal attention and does not leave impact.

(c) Civil society has access to modern knowledge and technology, such as the internet, which the poor and the marginalised are deprived of. Here, civil society should work as the bridge between the people and modern technology while advancing the cause of the people. Development communication needs to be exploited to benefit the people, to highlight their needs, establish their agenda and create opinion in support of them.

(d) Civil society should be inclusive and engage with religious and ethnic groups, because they may be part of the solution to the problems facing the people at the base. Just as religion and ethnicity can be used to generate conflict, they can also be used to promote communal harmony and relations.

(e) Civil society that receives donor money should stay above the line of suspicion. They should be extremely professional with financial accounting being clean and transparent.

(f) Civil society need to learn to work with political parties, network with them and lobby them to improve transparency within political parties. Political party members and leaders should also be trained in democratic practices.

6.5 Discussion and Synthesis

- There cannot be unity of the working class without unity among the workers and peasants to develop efficient strategies.
- The excluded sections of the population do not have a place in the leftist discourse, and pose a huge setback in drawing up strategies to benefit these groups.

- To discuss class issues with the workers in the free trade zone and draw them into larger working class movements is extremely difficult. The class movements have failed to recognize the new dimensions of new forces emerging as a result of neo-liberal globalisation, which does not recognise national struggles in any form.

- The South Korean case can be an important case for Nepal, not as a model to copy but as an alarm to be worried about. There should be a close monitoring of how the Nepali regime strikes a balance between democratic transformation and the requirements to be imposed by international protocols based on neo-liberal globalisation.

- Revolutionary potential becomes extremely low in a society with multi-ethnic and migrant people. In such societies, it may be advisable to look at other classes as the means for transformation. In view of the recent movements, the professional middle class seems to have potential for transformation.

- Social movements and political struggles should have a key role in the conscientisation of the people at large. The whole fact of being in struggle is to politicise and radicalise the people. But some of the presentations made ascribe people as the homogenous mass of unintelligent beings. Such presentations, especially at the behest of civil society, will only harm the process of cadre building and movements.

- Lasting alliance building requires farsightedness and cooperation. Such alliances should benefit the class being represented.
Chapter 7

CAN AID POLITICS BE REFORMED?

7.1 Aid Politics

I

n the 1980s, the civil society organisations around the world
pushed the UN to recognise that all nations, whether ‘rich’ or
‘poor’, are part of the international community. Three decades
later, the UN is still struggling to develop a common approach that
could be owned by all its members, and is failing to undo divisive
hierarchies being created amongst the members, especially by the
industrialised countries. Currently, development aid is being used as a
tool to create and reinforce such hierarchy.

The aid politics has bisected the world into one of the creditors and
debtors, with the former dominating the latter to with their designs,
prescriptions and policies. Covered in the package of aid is the old
colonial mentality, institutionalising an unequal hierarchy of patrons
and clients expressed in the language of conditionality. The way
development aid is being administered is contrary to the essence of
democracy.

Common wisdom holds that aid should aim to end most of the pressing
problems facing the word, such as famine, poverty, war and diseases.
Aid should be based on the common principles of equality, cooperation
and shared values. However, the development aid is now working in
the opposite direction.

7.2 Concerns

Should the aid politics cease to be a dividing and subjugating tool of
the powerful, it should immediately respond to the following three
concerns:

a) debt repudiation and cancellation of all illegitimate and odious
debt;

b) increased allocation of aid in line of the commitments made in
relation to MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and other
official commitments; and
c) reform of Official Development Aid (ODA) policy to ensure local ownership and aid and development effectiveness

Local ownership should be at the heart of the ODA as highlighted by the Paris Declaration, which states ownership as one of the five pillars of democracy. Locally owned processes become sensitive to the core issues of human rights, gender equality, conflict sensitivity and sustainability of development. More importantly, they promote people’s participation and hold leadership accountable. Locally owned processes also result in clear-cut development goals and outcomes.

7.3 Civil Society Role

To make local ownership a reality, civil society organisations should be engaged as part of the ODA process. Their role becomes decisive to mobilise people in dialogues and interactions, in framing and moderating debates and drawing up conclusions. Their participation can also be useful to clear up myths and mysteries. There are unfounded fears that democratic processes only complicate and further delay the business of aid, and they increase rather than decrease conditionality. Such misconceptions can be cleared only with more awareness and education programmes, interactions and critical engagements with both people and their leaders at various levels. There should also be a specific process and mechanism of consultation between donors and recipients. CSOs, as accountability promoting agents, should be available and willing to take active part in such consultations. In fact, they should do all they can to make sure that such consultations take place on a regular basis in order to make the aid responsive to the needs and priorities of recipient countries.

In order to have democratic ownership, we need to address the issue of conditionality. Debate should centre on how ownership can be ensured and how the rights of the people, not least of the poor, can be protected. Aid should not be used, as is being done now, as the means by which government imposes economic policies, which weaken the capacity of the people to claim their human rights.

- Ms. Jazminda Lumang-Buncan
IBON Foundation, Philippines
The role of CSOs will be paramount in making development aid transparent and effective. The development aid regime should recognise this role, and allocate a certain portion of ODA to address the capacity needs of CSOs, which include, among others, the need to expand networking at local, regional and global levels.

7.4 Discussion & Synthesis

- It should be faced upfront that there is fragmentation amongst the civil society organisations. Time has come to identify inherent contradictions within themselves and address them.

- There will be no democracy if the people are not organised to defend and promote their own interests.

- The existing form of democracy is being used by the elite to promote and maintain its interests and suppress the people. Democracy, thus, requires redefining in a new way, like in Bolivia, Venezuela, and even in Nepal.

- Democratic governance requires meaningful participation, and not partaking, of all groups and communities. It should, as a matter of priority, address the issues facing the marginalised and vulnerable. Unless those at the bottom are lifted first, the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged cannot be bridged.

- The existing development aid framework needs to be challenged to bring about significant changes. In the name of donor harmonisation the World Bank, IMF and USAID control the entire aid business and channel funds in a way that supports their interests. We have to be careful not to give legitimacy to such framework.
An alternative development paradigm should be developed to escape the traps created by the ruling elites.

To ensure a better future of democracy, the role of political parties should be redefined in relation to how they should interact with organised and unorganised masses.
Chapter 8

DEMONCRATISATION OF STATE AND DEVOLUTION OF POWER IN A GLOBALISED SOCIETY

8.1 Centralisation of Power

Globalisation has forced states to re-adjust their structures and institutions to facilitate the free flow of capital and technology. It has also changed the way political systems are controlled and made to work. The changes have direct implication on power structures of a state.

With globalisation expanding its influence, the executive branch of the state has increased, while the role of the legislature has declined. A study has revealed that the Indian parliament only met for 40 days in 2008. In the 1950s and 1960s, the parliament used to meet for 150 to 160 days a year. Even the judiciary is heavily influenced. Most of the decisions made are in favour of the corporate sector. Any move towards decentralisation is resisted and reversed.

The third world countries are getting centralised also because of ‘war on terror’, identity politics and insurgency. As states centralise their functioning and allow corporate power to expand, the power and will of public institutions to engage in welfare activities decreases, and the idea of cooperative federalism declines. While federal governments in the United States, Canada and Australia account for 60 percent of expenditures, third world countries are busy centralising them even reversing their decentralised activities. For example, the decentralised Brazil of the 1980s is now recentralising itself. This can be attributed to corporate globalisation.

Similarly, there are no differences in the way political parties work in most of the third world countries. Parties may differ in names, but not in policies and programmes. As such, it makes no difference for the people whether one political party or another comes to power. There is a rightward shift of all parties, including the organised left. Inner party democracy has almost become non-existent, especially in Asian and South Asian countries. Almost all party leaderships have become dynastic. They promote a patron-client relationship and marginalise
the opposition. Each keeps itself busy serving neo-liberal interests.

Globalisation has given rise to a global capitalist class with states, regimes and local elite having succumbed to the pressure of global powers, including IFIs. In return for their persistent loyalty, global capitalists promise them power and privilege, and help them maintain status quo. Under the aegis of globalisation, the national bourgeoisie has become comprador bourgeoisie.

8.2 Militarisation of States

There is also a rapid expansion of military power, both in terms of increased allocation of expenditures and militarisation of the mindset. India is one of the countries in the developing world that has huge allocation for the limity; its military budget being as high as nine billion dollars. There is yet another aspect of militarisation, which is the privatisation of security. In the USA, there is 1:1 ratio between the state military and private security forces. Private security seems to constitute the fastest growing business internationally. The only region where military budget is in the decline is Latin America.

With increased focus on national security and consequent budgetary allocation, states are withdrawing from their social service and humanitarian obligations. With this shift in focus, the gap between the rich and poor is alarmingly widening, globally and locally. The richest five percent of the world receives 114 times of the income of the poorest five percent. While poverty reduction efforts have not fared well, the number of billionaires is growing in an unprecedented scale, particularly in India, China and Russia.

The rights of the people are being violated in the pretext of national security, and militarisation is taking place in the pretext of controlling extremists. The third world nations are facing the challenge brought on by neo-liberal terrorism, militarism, corporate globalisation and debt slavery. The democracy that we are imagining should rise to these emerging threats. Here we are not talking about the democracy that is expressed only in the form of the right to vote.

- Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmad, Bangladesh
The alienation of the citizens from the state is increasing everywhere. This has resulted in ‘democratic deficit’, curtailment of freedom and the rise of populist politics. This leaves us with no choice but to fight. Our fight should be on many fronts. Ours is a fight for participatory democracy that builds on the interest, choice and participation of the people, especially those who are marginalised, oppressed and discriminated.

The powerful states are the ones to benefit from globalisation. However, majority of them have not signed labour laws protecting the rights of the workers who create the resources. The less industrialised countries officially received 126 billion dollars as remittance in 2004. In 2007 this increased to 251 billion dollars. In regards to India, the inward remittance by migrant labourers brought in 23 billion dollars in 2005-06, 25 billion in 2006-07 and 27 billion in 2007-08. Whereas
the flight of capital from the so-called high network individuals to outside countries was 9.6 billion dollars in 2005-06, 72.8 billion in 2006-07 and 440.5 billion in 2007-08. It was 50 billion in April 2008 alone. The Philippines, Nepal and Korea have also suffered such a terrible pattern of capital flight.

More countries now have national security laws than ever before. These draconian laws create a state of exception to constitutional and fundamental rights and freedoms.

8.3 Federalism and Devolution of Authority

The question facing all of us is whether it is possible to have a devolved situation in the context of South Asian countries. On analysing the nature of the states in South Asia, two features come out very strongly.

Firstly, all the states are already highly militarised, and such militarisation continues further. Despite being multi-national and multi-ethnic, the states are extremely centralised. They use ‘nationalism’ as a basis for maintaining the militarised state in where the military is an oppressive instrument of the elite. There is hardly any public discussion about restructuring of the military.

Secondly, all these states thrive on conflicts, because they provide a pretext for huge military missions. Not resolving those conflicts through peaceful means legitimises war and the use of military power as a means of conflict resolution. This pretext is working well in India. Under the current government, there is a rural employment guarantee scheme. But its implementation had to be reduced to one-thirds of districts on grounds of scarcity of resources. However, there was no hesitation to increase military expenditure. Soon after coming into power, the current government increased its defence budget by 23 percent.

With globalisation firming up its clutches, the notion of state sovereignty has turned to a myth. For example, Pakistan’s budget is made by an IMF team sitting in Islamabad. The under-secretary of the United States comes to Pakistan and summons concerned officials to the American embassy in Islamabad and tells them what to do. The whole notion of sovereignty has been the right of the elite through the state institutions to beat up its own citizens for whatever reasons. Unfortunately, many of us are also beholding this idea of sovereignty.
We are also beholding another ideological precept of the elite, which is the ideology of nationalism. Interestingly, in the conference there were no references of internal and intra-state conflicts through which people are being butchered by their respective states, as in Sri Lanka, north east Kashmir of India and Pakistan, among others. It seems like we are in an official conference where state governments do not interfere with each others’ affairs and only discuss issues that are mutually acceptable.

Devolution and federalism are minimum requirements for a democratisation process. Realisation of these concepts requires the creation and strengthening of auxiliary institutions. Such institutions cannot be created with a centralised mindset, such as the one we have seen in Nepal, where the governments irrespective of political ideology chose to run a highly centralised state. Even now, the communists with a majority are seemingly in a process of framing a constitution in a centralised manner.

To create a truly federal state with decentralisation and devolution of power with federating units and local governments, one constitution may not be the answer. There can be different constitutions for different federating units. The people of the concerned unit can frame their constitution as per their need. That can effectively reduce the constitution making time, and also ensure a genuine participation of the people. But the lawmakers are still engaged in a top-down approach that may ultimately defeat the spirit of broad-based participation and federalism.

If we are prepared to dispossess the elite, which are a necessary condition for democratisation of our states, we should build strategies to revamp the bureaucracy that serves the elite and hinders the process of devolution of power from the centre to the periphery. The existing bureaucracy has no accountability to the people.

Just as centralisation is antithesis of devolution, militarisation is contrary to democratisation. Both these elements feature in our countries. As we have seen, conflicts provide the basis for militarisation. The conflicts are not just internal phenomena, but are the result of regional and global processes and stratagems of one kind or another. Tackling of militarisation, thus, requires actions at all levels, from local to global.
8.4 Regional Initiative

In this backdrop of the conflict dynamics, what need to initiate a regional initiative, which should be a people-to-people interactive process to foster an enabling environment where conflicts are resolved through peaceful means, and where there is a strong public opinion against militarisation. A related agenda to be pushed is to reduce the size of the military, as well as military expenditures.

8.5 Discussion and Synthesis

- There will be no socialism without democracy and there will be no democracy without a socialist perspective.

- If there is no equity based mechanisms and no equal justice to all, how will good governance be dealt with?

- None of the presentations reflected the situations facing the disabled in the region.

- Our societies are also responsible for creating and perpetuating poverty, economic exploitation and social discrimination. It is not only the state to be blamed for all these vices.

- The people in the region are not well organised in order to enter the arena of national politics and coherently and cohesively seize power. They are still unorganised and fragmented. We need to develop the concept of local government to empower the people and build strategy for viable federalism.

- There is a need for regional actions and initiatives to address the issue of forced displacement, such as the situation in Bhutan.

- The experiences in Asia give us some indication of what we are trying to achieve with regard to democracy. We need to get out of narrow focus and should look into democracy with a holistic approach.

- The issue of the differently able people should not be treated as a separate concern. Rather, it should be dealt with as an inseparable part of the development discourse.

- Socialism is not a religion to be believed in. It is a practice to end the existing evils.
- Fighting globalisation also needs stopping governments from being influenced by imperialist forces.

- While market regulates remittances, it deregulates labour.

- A people's union of South Asia would be a welcome move to forward the process of democratisation in the region.

- It is imperative to transcend ourselves and our accidental identities if we are to succeed in achieving a new society.
ANNEXES

Annex 1: Programme

Conference on Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia

10-12 November 2008, Kathmandu, Nepal

10 November (Monday): Conference Day - 1

Time Activities

08:00 Registration

10:00-12:00 Inaugural Session: "The Financial Crisis, Democracy, Development and Peace in Asia", City Hall (Rashtriya Sabha Griha) Exhibition Road, Bhrikuti Mandap, Kathmandu, Nepal

- Chair - Dr. Arjun Karki, President of LDC Watch
- Welcome Remarks- Prof. Babu Mathew, SAAPE
- Highlights of the Programme - Prof. Lee Jung Ok, Director of International Cooperation Centre in Korea Democracy Foundation (KDF)
- Keynote Speech - Prof. Samir Amin, Political Economy analyst
- Speech - Ms. Sarita Giri, Member of CA and President, Nepal Sadhhabana Party (A)
- Speech - Dr. Narayan Khadka, Leader of Nepali Congress, and Member of CA
- Special Guest Speech - Madhav Nepal, Former General Secretary of CPN (UML) and former Deputy Prime Minister
- Chief Guest Speech - Prime Minister of Nepal and President, CPN (Maoist) Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda'
- Vote of thanks and session adjournment - Dr. Arjun Karki
13:00-14:00  **Lunch**

14:00-16:00  **Session 1: Understanding Democratic Transition in Nepal**

- **Chair**: Mr. Padma Ratna Tuladhar - Former Minister and Senior HR Defender

- **Presentation 1**: Democratic Transition in Nepal: Its Background and Challenges for the Future
  
i) Dr. Mathura P. Shrestha - Former Minister /Senior HR Defender
  
ii) Mr. C. K. Lal - Senior Political Analyst
  
iii) Dr. Gopal Krishan Shiwakoti - Senior HR Defender

- **Presentation 2**: Constitutionalism Federalism and Institutionalisation of Democracy in Nepal
  
  - Mr. Padma Ratna Tuladhar - Former Minister /Senior HR Defender

- **Open Discussion**: Political Transition from Monarchy to Republic and Restructuring of a Centralised, State Structures to a Federal Democratic State

16:00-16:15  **Tea/Coffee break**

16:15-18:15  **Session 2: Key Challenges for Participatory Democracy in Asia**

- **Chair**: Mr. Lee Suk-tae, Member of Board of KDF

- **Presentation 1**: Challenges arising in the Political Transition to Democracy
  
  - Mr. Joao Boavida, ED of CSPAD, Timor-Leste (East Timor)

- **Presentation 2**: Challenges arising in the consolidation of democracy
  
  - Antonio Prajasto, Deputy Director of DEMOS, Indonesia

- **Presentation 3**: Asian democracy: an electoral slogan or an ideal
  
  - Sakool Zuesongdham, Director of Asian Network for Free Election
- **Presentation 4**: Democratic local ownership in development cooperation or private investment from the perspective of Asian region
  - Ms. Jazminda Lumang, ED of IBON Foundation, the Philippines

- **Open Discussion**: construction of democratic forms of development at domestic level in the context of international development cooperation and globalisation

**19:30 Welcome Dinner**

**11 November (Tuesday): Conference Day 2**

**08:30-10:00**  
**Session 3: Key Challenges for Participatory Democracy in Asia: Country Experiences**

- **Chair**: Mr. Rajan Bhattarai, Nepal

  **Discussants/Presenters:**
  - Mr. Abid Hasan Minto, Pakistan
  - Ms. Thida Khus, Cambodia
  - Mr. Mohan Tamang, Bhutan
  - Mr. Tian Chua, Malaysia
  - Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, India
  - Mr. Stanikzai’s Abdul Khaliq, Afghanistan
  - Mr. Chit Ko Ko Oo, Myanmar

- **Open Discussion**: Identification of Key Factors and Challenges for Expansion and Strengthening of Participatory Democracy in Asia

**10:00-10:15**  
**Tea/Coffee**

**10:15-12:45**  
**Session 4: Peace-Building in Political Processes to Democracy**

- **Chair**: Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, India

- **Presentation 1**: Internal conflicts in the transition to democracy: the cause and influences for institutionalisation of democracy and peace building processes
i) Lead Presenter - Mr. Ahmad Suaedy, ED, the Wahid Institute, Indonesia

ii) Lead Presenter - Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Sri Lanka

- Presentation 2: Prevention of Violent Conflicts in Democratic Frameworks

i) Lead Presenter - Ms. Seema Mustafa, India

ii) Lead Presenter - Dr. Nimalka Fernando, Sri Lanka

- Open Discussions: The Advantages and Risks of Democracy in Peace-Building at Domestic level in the context of the "War on Terror"

12:45-13:45 Lunch
13:45-16:45 Session 5: Identifying Key Challenges and Moving towards Alternative Democracy in Asia

- Chair: Mr. Francis Dae-Hoon Lee, ARENA

- Presentation 1: Identifying key challenges to civil societies - democracy intricate

  i) The labour movement and democratisation in the Philippines: a template for South East Asia - Ms. Verna Viajar, The Philippines

  ii) Sovereignty and class: converging and contradictory movements of the democratic challenges of the people of Bangladesh - Mr. Farad Mazhar, Bangladesh

  iii) Impact of globalisation on state, civil society and democracy: the case of South Korea - Dr. Seung Won Lee, South Korea

Presentation 2: Building democracy from among the voiceless and marginalised

i) Listening, articulating and building democracy from among the voiceless and marginalised - Mr. Andrew Aria, Malaysia

ii) Radical democracy: recent experiments in Indonesia from below - Mr. Kenbudha Kusumandaru, Indonesia

iii) Mr. Tian Chua, Malaysia
Open Discussions: Construction of Democratic forms of Development at Domestic Level in the Context of International Cooperation

16:45-19:00  Experience sharing for understanding democratic transition in Nepal

Chair: Dr. Bishnu Upreti, Nepal

Speakers:
- Mr. Sushil Pyakurel - Former Commissioner, NHRC / Senior HR Defender
- Prof. Kapil Shrestha - Former Commissioner, NHRC / Senior HR Defender
- Ms. Sharmila Karki, President, Jagaran Nepal and Secretary, NGO Federation of Nepal
- Dr. Renu Rajbhandari - Senior Civil Society Leader/HR Defender, President WOREC Nepal
- Prof. Rajan Pokharel - Tribhuvan University, Nepal
- Mr. Akhtar Hussain - Former President, Sindh High Court Bar Association and Vice Chairman of Bar Council and Secretary Genera of National Workers Party of Pakistan

19:00  Dinner

12 November (Wednesday): Conference Day 3

09:00-12:00  Session 5: Good Governance for Democratic Development and Peace

Chair: Mr. Sushovan Dhar, VAK, India

Presentation 1: Democratisation-Development-Peace Complex Societal Structures Clashing with Basic Tenets of Democracy
i)  Lead Presenter- Prof. Ram Bapat, India
ii) Lead Presenter- Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmad, Bangladesh

Presentation 2: Civil Society Empowerment and the Democratisation of the State Devolution of Power
i)  Lead Presenter- Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, India
ii) Lead Presenter- Mr. Karamat Ali, Pakistan
- **Open Discussions**: Capacity Building of Actors/ Institutions Consisting of Governance: Pro-people Development, Regional Balance and Redistribution

**12:00-13:00 Closing Session**

- **Chair**: Dr. Arjun Karki, LDC Watch
- **Guest Speaker**: C. P. Gajurel, Senior Leader of CPN (M) and CA Member, Nepal
- Prof. Lee Jung Ok, KDF
- Mr. Francis Dae-Hoon Lee, ARENA
- Dr. Arjun Karki, LDC Watch
- **Conference Concluding Remarks**
  - Prof. Babu Methew, India
  - Mr. Tian Chua, MP, People’s Justice Party, Malaysia
  - Mr. Joao Boavida, Executive Director, Centre of Studies for Peace and Development (CEPAD), Timore-Leste

**13:00 Lunch and Departures**
## Annex 2: List of Participants

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<td>Balram Baskota</td>
<td>ANPPa</td>
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<td>Action Aid</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
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<td>NFN</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Debaki Acharya</td>
<td>CWIN</td>
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<td>NFD-N Nepal</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Dr. Bal Chandra</td>
<td>HR Alliance</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td><a href="mailto:balchandra.mishra@hotmail.com">balchandra.mishra@hotmail.com</a></td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Dr. Bishnu Raj Upreti</td>
<td>NCCCR North-South</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td><a href="mailto:bupreti@nccr.wlink.com.np">bupreti@nccr.wlink.com.np</a></td>
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<td><a href="mailto:zahirbano@yahoo.com">zahirbano@yahoo.com</a></td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
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<td>Francis D. Lee</td>
<td>HR Alliance</td>
<td><a href="mailto:frankslee@gmail.com">frankslee@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Gaurav G. K.</td>
<td>UPR</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gauravgk@gmail.com">gauravgk@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Giya Shamsia Maqsood</td>
<td>IHED - International</td>
<td><a href="mailto:gisema@yahoo.com">gisema@yahoo.com</a></td>
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<td>HR activist</td>
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<td>Forum Themi Hondo</td>
<td><a href="mailto:hamidullahkhan@gmail.com">hamidullahkhan@gmail.com</a></td>
<td>Senegal</td>
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<td>Jeet Bir Lama</td>
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<td>National Integrated Development Society</td>
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<td>RNR</td>
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<td>PSRN</td>
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<td>Focus</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:meena@focusweb.org">meena@focusweb.org</a></td>
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<td>DYP, Bhutan</td>
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<td>South Asia Federation</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mohisoo5@gmail.com">mohisoo5@gmail.com</a></td>
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<td>Nasir A Mansoor</td>
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<td>RRN</td>
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<td>Nima Terna</td>
<td>IMADE/MDL</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>Nimesh Shrestha</td>
<td>RRN</td>
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<td>Prasanna Chitrakar</td>
<td>Freelance Consultant</td>
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<td>Rajan Bhattarai</td>
<td>JNU, India</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
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<td>INHURED International</td>
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<td>EARN/UP</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
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<td>RRN</td>
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<td>WF2V</td>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td><a href="mailto:yogendra.shahi@gmail.com">yogendra.shahi@gmail.com</a></td>
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Annex 3: Conference Photographs

Prime Minister Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, the Chief Guest, inaugurating the conference

Opening Session: (From left) Prof. Babu Mathew, Prof. Lee Jung Ok, Dr. Narayan Khadka, PM Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal ‘Prachanda’, Mr. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Dr. Arjun Karki, Prof. Samir Amin and Ms. Sarita Giri
Guest Speakers at the Inaugural Session

Conference Participants at the Inaugural Session
(From left) Dr. Gopal K. Siwakoti, Prof. Dr. Mathura Shreshta, Mr. Padma Ratna Tuladhar and Mr. C.K.Lal

(From left) Ms. Jazminda Lumang-Buncan, Mr. Sakool Zuesongdham, Mr. João Boavida, Mr. Anton Pradesto and Mr. Lee Suk-tae
(From left) Ms. Thida Khus, Mr. Abdul Khaliq Stanikazai, Mr. Tian Chua, Mr. Rajan Bhattarai, Prof. Kamal Mitra Chenoy, Mr. Chit Ko Ko Oo and Mr. Mohan Tamang

(From left) Dr. Nimalka Fernando, Mr. Ahmad Suaedey, Prof. Anuradha Chenoy, Mr. Vasudeva Nanayakkara, Ms. Seema Mustafa and Dr. Sarba Raj Khadka
(From left) Dr. Renu Rajbhandari, Prof. Kapil Shrestha, Mr. Sushil Pyakurel, Ms. Sharmila Karki, Dr. Bishnu Uprety, Mr. Akhtar Hussain and Prof. Rajan Pokhrel

(From left) Prof. Babu Mathew, Prof. Lee Jung Ok, Mr. C.P. Gajurel, Dr. Arjun Karki, Mr. Joao Boavida, Mr. Tian Chua and Mr. Francis Dae-Hoon Lee