

# SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S PEACE MANIFESTO

*The fundamental objective of SAHR's South Asian Peace Missions is to bring women into the mainstream security discourse in order to improve the prospects of peace not only at the national level but to create greater discourse on regional peace and security.*







## P R E A M B L E

**W**OMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS ASSOCIATED WITH South Asians for Human Rights, share a vision of South Asia as a region where attaining peace, justice, democracy and respect for human rights are the shared aspirations of the people and our governments. Our vision includes a region that promotes, protects and respects women's human rights as equal citizens and where women's contributions in peace building is not only recognized, but also actively facilitated.

Women and men committed to promoting peace, democracy and human rights in countries of South Asia consider that countries in the region face common problems that impede social progress and economic development at national levels. They reiterate that overcoming these common problems is critical for building peaceful relations amongst South Asian states for the common benefit of people in the region.

Intolerance and inability to fully accept the cultural, religious and social diversity of our populations and refusal to accommodate and celebrate this plurality have plunged South Asian states into internal conflicts and communal tensions.

Neo liberal economic policies adopted by all South Asian countries have led to state supported unbridled acquisition of land, forest, minerals, water and other natural resources leading to dispossession and displacement and become a major source of conflict. Sexual violence and other forms of violence targeting women could be attributed to the commoditization of women in this regard. HRDs at the helm of these movements resisting this model of development have faced numerous challenges including risk to their life.

Inter-state tensions and internal conflicts have adversely affected political stability, economic development, governance and the respect for human rights in all countries of the region, which has provided a space to extremists to misuse ethnic, religious and linguistic differences to create division and conflict.

While it is true that geo-strategic global interests are exacerbating tensions and producing conditions whereby the interests of the people of the region have become subservient to external interests and forces, governments in South Asian States have paid little attention to the common interests of the people of the region and have allowed narrow self-interests to disturb regional peace.

Increasing militarization and the expanding role of the military in most countries of the region has become a real threat to participatory democracy and responsible governance.

The security narrative is dominated by the military in most of these countries and the people have been denied the right to define imperatives of national security or people's security or to have a voice in building peaceful relations with countries within the region.

Even though the situations of conflict have had a severe impact on the lives of women and other vulnerable and marginalized communities, they have, by and large, been denied a role in peace building and are excluded from peace processes, whether related to internal conflicts or to tensions between states in the region.

Flawed governance, failure to halt ever-deepening inequalities, injustice, discrimination, disregard for human rights, and denial of civil society space, undermine progress towards deepening democracy in countries of the region.

Dedicating our efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights in the region to build and strengthen people's movement for peace, we as South Asians for Human Rights:

Call upon States to take effective action to curb and deter violence in the name of religion, ethnicity, gender caste or creed and to end impunity for such violence;

Resolve to expose and counter the trends of extremism and intolerance;

Urge South Asian Governments to ensure protection of the rights of religious, ethnic and cultural minorities and of indigenous communities where they exist;

Expect all states in the region to take joint, coordinated and effective action for eradication of the menace of terrorism while fully complying with the principles and standards laid down by international Human Rights Law and International Humanitarian Law, especially for the protection of all civilians with special care to the protection of women and children;

Require states to respect people's right to information and to formulate policies on counter-terrorism in a transparent manner with regular updates to the public on the progress in implementation of these policies and to ensure means of independent verification of governmental claims;

Undertake to contribute towards peaceful resolution of internal and inter-state conflicts and tensions through dialogue and negotiation;

Endeavor to strengthen democratic institutions; and create regional platforms for national institutions for improving legislative and electoral processes; as well as preserve the right of representative bodies to have a central role in important decision-making;

Intend to make regional and national level interventions to ensure greater participation of women, both in political representation and in electoral processes;

Plan to build regional platforms and encourage national mobilization to stress people's right to participate in formulating security paradigms, with the full and equal participation of women to ensure the inclusion of gender perspectives on peace and security;

Are committed to continue our initiatives to increase women's knowledge and skills and enable their full participation in decision-making and in all processes for prevention, management and resolution of conflicts and to ensure full participation of women in mainstream security discourse in the region.

Are determined to take forward objectives of all United Nations Security Council Resolutions on women, peace and security and urge and support for their realisation. ■





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