

People's Caravan 2000

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Engaging a crowd of over 50,000 on November 30 - one year since the massive protests against the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its brand of globalisation - the People's Caravan 2000 ended three weeks of activities in India, Bangladesh and the Philippines, with simultaneous events in Japan, Korea and Indonesia. The People's Caravan travelled over 2,500 km through Tamil Nadu, India, Bangladesh and within Manila, the Philippines from November 13 - 30. The Caravan called for an end to the devastating effects from the globalisation of agriculture and instead advocated genuine agrarian reform, food security, social justice and land and food without poisons.

Over 10,000 people - local farmers, agricultural workers, fisherfolk, students, scientists, teachers, the media, government officials, and anti-pesticide and anti-genetic engineering (GE) advocates - participated in lively discussions at public meetings, press conferences, and educational teach-in's at bus stops, in rice fields, in villages and towns. Food festivals, seed exchanges, songs and street theatre celebrated local initiatives towards more sustainable, healthy agriculture.

The Caravan was organised by Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific (PAN AP); Society for Rural Education and Development (SRED) and Tamil Nadu Women's Forum (TNWF), India; UBINIG and Nayakrishi Andolon, Bangladesh; and Kilusang Magbubukid Ng Pilipinas (KMP), the Philippines; in collaboration with SHISUK, Bangladesh; CIKS and PREPARE, India; Gita Pertiwi, Indonesia; NESSFE, Japan; CACPK, Korea; and Food First, USA.

Rural communities discussed the transition from traditional farming to export-oriented crop production and its impacts on them - increasing

landlessness; hazardous pesticide use; and the potential onslaught of unsafe, unproven experimental GE technologies.

Speaking in Bangladesh on land conversion and the erosion of food security, Santi Gangadharan, a pesticide activist with TNWF, said: *"As we travel this country we are very happy to find the fields so full of paddy. In India, most of the farmers have been forced to grow cash crops instead of food crops due to the process of globalisation and liberalisation and because the government wants more export earnings. Now there is no paddy. The fields have been converted into flower gardens for export. Due to globalisation many people in the villages have been forced to leave. They have left their traditional homes, entered urban areas and many of them are without enough food"*.

Landlessness is rising among the poor farmers of Asia. This tragedy is particularly evident in the Philippines. Rafael Mariano, chairperson of KMP, is critical of the Filipino government's commitment to the WTO in promoting the World Bank's imposition of market-assisted land reform. This involves joint venture schemes that allow landlords and foreign capitalists to appropriate land for export crop production. *"In effect, the schemes reduce the farmers to being farm workers receiving measly wages."*

Asian countries, in general, are suffering from a collapsing agricultural sector. Much of this has to do with the use of Green Revolution farming practices, underpinned by monoculture cropping and the use of pesticides and fertilisers.

Farmer Jahanara Begum, speaking in Bangladesh, urged farmers not to abandon their traditional farming practises in favour of industrial agricultural methods. *"We have so many varieties of rice seeds, but instead we are going for the varieties of IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) and the seed companies. These*

seeds need a chemical package. When we use local varieties we get a yield of 40 kg of rice. When we use pesticides and the companies seeds we get 20 kg more but we also destroy our soil, water and biodiversity".

She added: *"How many poisons are you using? We have lost our birds, our fish, the wildlife. We have lost all this for 20 kg more and we spend more money on our family's health. Transnational companies - they come, they go. They don't care about our health or our environment. No more, we've had enough! Stop using pesticides and gradually reduce the use of fertilisers. For our survival we have to commit ourselves to land and food without poisons!"*

Sarojeni Rengam, Executive Director of PAN AP, told the crowd that today the pesticides market is a \$32 billion industry. With the advent of seeds, genetically engineered to tolerate herbicides or to be dependent on chemical inducers to promote growth and development, the use of hazardous pesticides will only increase.

Speaking on the development of GE rice, Farida Akhter, Executive Director of UBINIG said, *"UBINIG urged all farmers in the rice producing and rice consuming countries of Asia to resist planting GE rice as it is harmful socially, economically, environmentally and also an attack on farmers' sovereignty to produce their own staple food!"*

The People's Caravan also celebrated local initiatives towards more sustainable, healthy agriculture. Agriculture that is in the hands of the people, is for the people, and can really feed them and free them from dependence on hazardous pesticides and other dangerous agricultural inputs and technologies.

In Trichy, India, Tony Tujan, chairperson of the Asia Pacific Research Network (APRN), said: *"As sustainable agriculture practitioners, we have shown the world that we can grow food without poisons. We must all work together to challenge industrialised agriculture and agrochemical TNCs."*

From the 'summary of events' press release.
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People's Caravan 2000. Photo: PAN-AP

