

## Celebrating Asian Women's Day – A Day of Our Own for Our Rights and Future



ASIAN WOMEN'S DAY  
AUGUST 8

This August 8, we mark Asian Women's Day – the beginning of a tradition that brings Asian women's voices and struggles in sharper focus and celebrates their gains with renewed commitment to fight for the realization of their rights and a better life.

Inspired by International Women's Day, March 8, we remember those who resolutely and courageously struggled before us, enabling our enjoyment today of greater freedoms than before. There is no greater homage than to keep this spirit alive wherever we are, by carrying on the fight where women remain subjugated, discriminated and exploited.

Here in Asia, millions of women remain impoverished and deprived of many basic rights such as the rights to food, decent shelter, health, water and sanitation, healthy environments and sustainable energy. Discrimination against women continues to manifest in many ways and in various spaces, including laws and policies, violence and abuse within and outside the home and in multiplying burdens of unpaid work and caring labors.

Asian women face heightening challenges as neoliberal institutions and wealthy, powerful elites target our region with ever-growing intensity to pull the global economic order out of the grip of chronic crises inherent in the capitalist order. Over many decades of neoliberal economic policy, we are witness to the various ways that it feeds on humanity and the environment in a vain attempt to satisfy the limitless greed for profit and growth. These range from crushing labor with stagnant wages, pursuing labor flexibilization, privileging capital with risk-free but revenue-eroding business environments, plunder and destruction of natural resources and the environment, among others.



Asian women are among those at greatest risk from the devastating impacts of escalating climate change. The climate crisis is a product of the capitalist order which involves excessive and ever-increasing use of fossil fuels and the destruction of natural carbon sinks in a relentless pursuit for profit. The failure of governments to take ambitious and equitable action, the continuing insistence of corporations and elites to put profit ahead of the welfare of people and planet, bring us closer to the point of planetary-wide climate catastrophes. The climate crisis is a grim and urgent reminder that nothing short of a thorough-going comprehensive systemic transformation can ensure the rights, welfare, emancipation and future of women and all peoples.

Patriarchal systems remain stubbornly embedded in many Asian societies. These, too, help maintain neoliberal economic systems by promoting, for one, discriminatory norms and practices that marginalize, exclude, silence, commodify and instrumentalize women for profitable ends. From carrying a much heavier share of unvalued,



unrecognized and unpaid but socially vital care work, women are usually channeled into the lower rungs of the services sector which are deemed unskilled labor and thus, poorly paid. They are also heavily into domestic work abroad despite risk to life and limb, propping up economies that cannot adequately generate local employment while sustaining their families' needs in the face of inadequate public service delivery and high-priced private sector costs.



Even with gender equality laws and programs in place, change is often too little, too



slow and too late. At the current rate of progress, it is estimated that achieving gender equality would still take more than 200 years. Governments themselves have proven complicit in hindering gender equality, such as upholding corporate interest over peoples' rights by surrendering their mandate of public service provision to the private sector. We need to vigorously hold our governments to account for violations as well as inaction on commitments they made to fulfill women's human rights. An opportune moment lies

before us in the 2020 commemoration of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action that 189 states signed in 1995 as the global agenda for advancing the rights of women and girls and achieving gender equality in critical areas of concern, including poverty, health, education and the economy.

Steeped in the difficulties of struggle, we are only too aware of bigger obstacles lying ahead, not least of which is the vengeful backlash by patriarchy and capitalism in their increasing moments of desperation and retreat.

Commemorating Asian Women's Day, however, is not only about the impediments to our emancipation and empowerment, which remains an important task nonetheless, that should be grounded in our local and regional contexts. Let today and every 8<sup>th</sup> of August thereafter, mark a time and space to celebrate each other, to be hopeful and be inspired by our collective, hard-won victories to gather our energies and boldly advance the fight from our corner of the world for a gender-just, humane and sustainable future.

**Join us in commemorating a meaningful and empowering first Asian Women's Day!**

**ASIAN PEOPLES' MOVEMENT ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT  
8 AUGUST 2019**