The Asian Peasant Coalition (APC) composed of more than 15 million members representing 33 organizations in nine (9) countries in Asia such as Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Pakistan, Mongolia, Philippines and Indonesia urge their governments to withdraw their membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO) saying that their country's inclusion to the neo-liberal trading system wreak havoc to local agriculture and promoted landgrabbing across their countries.

The Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka joined the WTO in January 1995 while Mongolia in January 1997 and Nepal in April 2004.

In time for the 8th WTO Ministerial Conference, the APC with the Our World Is Not For Sale organizes several events in Indonesia, India and the Philippines.

Action against WTO in PH

In the Philippines, members of the APC such as the Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas (KMP), the fisherfolk alliance Pamalakaya, Amihan (National Federation of Peasant Women) and Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agrikultura (UMA) organized the 2nd Rural People's Conference and Action against WTO and Imperialist Plunder together with the Anakpawis party list, they signed a manifesto asking the Aquino government to take Philippine agriculture out of WTO.

The anti-WTO conference was held in the morning of December 15 in Sampaloc, Manila and was attended by 200 farmer and rural folk leaders while in the afternoon, the group marched to the US Embassy in Manila. The first Rural People's Conference against WTO was held in December 2001 in front of the US Embassy in Manila.

APC and KMP secretary general Danilo Ramos said it is high time for the Philippine government to make a decisive stand against the 17-year old membership of the country in WTO, which resulted to global and domestic landgrabbing, dismal performance of local agriculture and food insecurity, and extreme hunger and poverty.

The farmer leader campaigned for the abolition of WTO and convince other farmer groups in Latin America, Europe, the African continent, South Asia and Southeast Asia to support the global call to junk WTO and imperialist globalization policies.

Protest in Indonesia

Also on December 15, the Aliansi Gerakan Reform Agraria (AGRA) led a rally to Junk WTO. The event in front of the US Embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia was joined by 350 farmers and advocates.

Rahmat Ajiguna, APC deputy secretary general and concurrent AGRA secretary general, denounces WTO as primary instrument of developed nations in exploiting the people and resources of developing nations.

Rahmat added that he wanted to see the Indonesian government put the nation's interests first, and not allow the Special Products and Special Safeguard Mechanisms to be sacrificed. The SP-SSM allows WTO member countries to impose import duties on certain types of farm imports deemed damaging to their agricultural sectors. Failure to insist on retaining the SP-SSM would further threaten the livelihoods of more than 21 million farming families in Indonesia.

Workshops on WTO

The statement said the APC and the Our World Is Not For Sale (OWINFS) organizes workshop on "WTO, Agriculture and Sustainable Development" in Indonesia and India aimed at discussing the WTO issues in relation to agriculture and sustainable development.

The Southeast Asia workshop was hosted by the Aliansi Gerakan Reforma Agraria (AGRA) and WALHI (Jawa Barat) held on November 20 at Pangalengan in Bandung, Indonesia. Thirty (30) people attended the event coming from Vietnam, Cambodia, Philippines, and Indonesia. Mr. P. Chennaiah of APVVU (India) and a member of the OWINFS Coordinating Team served as the resource person.

In Kolkata, India, the South Asia workshop was hosted by the Indian Federation of Toiling Peasants (IFTOP), Institute for Motivating Self-Employment (IMSE), All Nepal Peasants Federation (ANPFa) and the South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE) held on December 12 with fifty two (52) people mostly farmers from Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Indonesia and the Philippines. Mr. Prem Dangal, ANPFa Secretary General served as the main resource person.

This workshops underscore the reality that work on the national level is most important in effecting change—to pressure governments not to accept new market access demands from the US and EU, and to continue to demand a development agenda on the WTO

WTO blamed

The peasant group blamed their country's membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO), asserting that their country's adherence to neo-liberal trade policies produced unfavorable deals liberalizing the Asian agriculture which has aggravated the dumping of food and agricultural products surpluses of developed countries leading to their country's heavy reliance on food produced by other countries.

The group asserted that their country's entry to the WTO worsened agricultural trade deficit. In the Philippines for example, the rush of imports – especially of rice which now takes up over a third of all agricultural imports – has driven soaring agricultural trade deficits. Largely trade surpluses before 1994 turned into a US$287.4 million deficit in 1994 which continuously increased to reach US$3.2 billion in 2010 (down from a recent rice-import-driven peak of US$3.8 billion in 2008). The biggest agricultural product deficits were in cereals, dairy products, meat, coffee, tea, cocoa and spices

Finally, the APC said that the WTOs Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) has devastated Asian agriculture and eroded food security and food sovereignty. #