

Asia Pacific Peacebuilders Unite!- 19 June 2007, Singapore

On the 15th June 2007 20 members of GPPAC Asia Pacific from 17 different countries/regions met in Da Nang, Vietnam to join in the first ever GPPAC Asia Pacific Inter-Regional Forum. The Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) has been active in Asia Pacific for the last 5 years with strong and innovative processes in each of the 4 regions – Northeast Asia, Pacific, Southeast Asia and South Asia – gathering civil society organizations to build peace by making a shift from reaction to prevention on conflicts and violence.

This gathering is of great importance for all peacebuilders in the continent. The Forum set out to strengthen inter-regional cooperation on issues of regional priority through information exchange and relationship-building, as well as strategizing on cross-cutting issues to improve advocacy effectiveness and inter-regional coordination, and lastly developing concrete plans to optimize inter-regional cooperation.

Building on the strong contacts of our host, Peace Boat, with the young people of Da Nang after having visited the city 27 times, GPPAC Asia Pacific (GPPAC AP) delegates stepped out for the first time to meet with over 2000 young people in a night of color, music and a celebration of our mutual commitment to peace. The following day the representatives had the honor of meeting with civil society of Da Nang to hear about their suffering related to Agent Orange used during the Vietnam War. Hearing the testimonies of some of the victims, GPPAC AP was ever more strengthened in our commitment to work on conflict prevention and peacebuilding in the region to ensure that such atrocities will never happen again. This was a feeling personally expressed by many at the press conference following the meeting.

Boarding the Peace Boat in Da Nang, GPPAC AP set out on a journey to map the similarities, differences and possibilities of cooperation amongst the four regions. Listening to each others challenges, priorities and needs, the Forum learnt from each others experiences and developed a plan to more effectively cooperate and support each other's work.

While engaging in a process of collective deliberation on such urgent issues as the nuclear arms and missile proliferation and geo-political power struggles in Northeast Asia and South Asia, along with crises of democracy, self-determination, human security and cultures of violence in the Pacific and Southeast Asia. The Forum recognized the need to respond to urgencies in Timor Leste, Burma, Sri Lanka, Guam, West Papua, Solomon Islands, North Korea, Fiji, the Philippines, Thailand and Japan. The Forum therefore agreed to formulate a concrete action plan including strategies to address identified issues.

Some specific activities planned for the coming months include supporting the planned solidarity and monitoring mission to the Timor Leste elections; joining the global initiative to protect Peace Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution; writing a joint article on the security situation in the South Pacific including evolving patterns of relations across the Taiwanese strait; developing an inter-regional historical text book to accurately reflect facts pertaining to various issues and challenges facing the region; and exploring possibilities for organizing a fact finding mission on the human rights situation in Sri Lanka.

The Forum discussed the situation in Burma and agreed to send a petition calling for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung Sun Suu Kyi. The petition was signed by 650 Peace Boat passengers, including Asia Pacific Forum members and was presented at the GPPAC Asia Pacific Multi-Stakeholder Roundtable, ASEAN at 40 years: Building Partnerships for Peace in the Asia Pacific Region held in Singapore on the 19th June 2007. On the same day, upon arrival in the Singapore harbor a 30 meter banner was unfurled on the side of the Peace Boat, wishing Aung Sun Suu Kyi a Happy Birthday.

With the establishment of GPPAC Asia Pacific, the existing web of connections between national, regional and international parts of GPPACs work has now been formally recognized and consolidated in Asia Pacific. Plans are under way for the next Forum to be held in May 2008. GPPAC Asia Pacific brings together a diverse range of peacebuilding initiatives on various issues to support, strengthen and cooperate on conflict prevention and peacebuilding for the people of Asia Pacific.