

Report on the Women's Counsel and the situation in Sri Lanka by Menu de Silva

The 11th Women's Political counsel took place in Germany at the University of Chemnitz

It's my pleasure to thank you for all the staff giving support for me to travel to Germany. This was a very good opportunity for me to **join** with you as a woman from Asia, in order to have a very good gathering and the discussion related to the women's **political participation**.



1. Regarding my idea and my impression

As we all know, all over the world women have become involved in different forms of struggle, as they carry their fight in their farms, picket lines, street demonstrations, parliaments and urban centers. Women are holding up banners and are in the frontline – from protesting against the incursion of transnational corporations right up to human rights struggles and the fight for freedom and justice in their own environments and workplaces. This is what we heard all over the world. On this meeting they chose a very good topic: “Women of the world climbing the highest mountains”. Yes, this topic shows us how women struggle for their rights. And also how they implement these rights.

Women have joined hands to reclaim their rights, their knowledge and skills, this is what I saw in this 11th Women's Political Counsel, this is the main and the best thing that we **need**.

We need to strengthen the women's movement because the year 2011 is the 100th year of the commemoration of International Women's Day. In 1911, a year after the declaration of an International Working Women's Day by the International Socialist Women, townhouse meetings, street rallies and other forms of protest and celebration marked the first International Women's Day in Europe. In 1977, two years after the UN declared 1975 as the International Year of Women, March 8 was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly as International Women's Day. One hundred years since the first International Women's Day, women continue to struggle against economic, political, social and gender marginalization and oppression. Through their organizations, Asian women have shown that victimization is not a natural phenomenon which should be tolerated; and that women, especially poor rural and urban women, once awakened to the roots of their oppression and victimization, are willing to organize themselves and advance their rights, welfare and personhood. Through their organizations, Asian women have repeatedly shown that where there is oppression, there is resistance!

So we are still in the struggle. But the Women's Political Counsel is a very good platform, in order to bring forward all our issues all over the world. On every continent, women are suffering, we have heard examples on the Political counsel:

- Joly from Bangladesh presented issues of the garment workers there
- Struggle against women's oppression by the Islamic State (IS), today especially the threatening IS massacre in Kobanê and Rojava.
- Struggle against women and the working class in Europe

- Trafficking of women

These struggles and issues, for which we have gathered in this meeting, are very important. We can take concrete actions for these issues from the discussion by sharing ideas with all respectable women.

So once again I thank you all for giving me this opportunity to participate at this event and for sharing my ideas with all the participants. And we can think about what we can do in order to change this world. So this is my impression of this valuable meeting, of the discussion and of what I bring to my country.

2. My Work in Sri Lanka,

I am Menu De Silva, and my profession is Human Resources Manager in the organization, on behalf of which I am an environmentalist and women's activist. I work in the women's movement in Sri Lanka and with the rural women. I work for the women's rights, climate protection, environmental protection, and biodiversity based on ecological agriculture and recycling. We especially fight against the corporation Agro Chemical INC's.

I would like to point out how rural women are working in Sri Lanka.

Rural women are regarded as integral in agro-ecological practices, knowledge systems and methods. They have vast knowledge in agricultural processes, such as pest management, harvesting, selecting and preserving seeds for the next crop, soil enrichment and so on. They are the seed keepers, traditional healers, livestock keepers, and forest gatherers. They have knowledge of the diverse kinds of plants and their special values for taste, nutrition and health. Their knowledge of plant varieties extends to wild plants which are regarded as survival plants in dire times, as traditional medicine and as sources of income. Learning by experience, and

experimenting and innovating when faced with problems, they have developed a vast amount of knowledge, particularly on seeds, and various skills in agriculture over generations, and have provided food security and nutrition to millions of families. Rural women, together with farmers and indigenous communities have resisted and continue to resist against the instrumentalities driving their displacement, further loss of seeds and erosion of traditional agriculture. The areas of struggle have steadily widened from women protesting against the incursion of TNCs to resisting the use of agro-chemicals; from opposing the entry of GE seeds to promoting and documenting local and traditional knowledge systems; from initiating seed exchanges and developing seed banks to lobbying existing international conventions and treaties which serve as tools for advocacy and platforms of resistance.

Over the years, my organization has continued to promote and support biodiversity ecological agriculture. It considers the efforts to recover and reclaim the rights of women in sustainable agriculture as important. Pushing this is a process of empowerment for rural women. Being key food producers in agricultural communities, it is the women's assertion of rights to land, seeds, water and other resources – a crucial step towards reclaiming women's knowledge and skills and a process of recognizing their roles and contribution in agricultural production.

The Environment counsel in Germany is a platform for discussing these issues all over the world, so I am very happy to be with you as a coordination group of the 3rd environment counsel and to discuss our issues and also the environmental issues that other countries are facing.

Nowadays in my country people are suffering from pesticide poisons. So many farming communities are ill from kidney diseases by the arsenic chemicals. I think I can discuss this with you with the detailed figures and reports, as my

organization did the research and also a case study with regard to this issue. And I need to spread this to all over the world. I think that the Environmental counsel is the place, where I can share these details.