

## **‘The Bottom Up’ International Labour Solidarity: Victims’ Organizing in the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims**

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### **Introduction: Paradox of Shining Asia**

Asia, with its population of well over 4 billion, is home to more than 60% of humanity and constitutes the largest section of the global working population. ‘Shining Asia’ is often portrayed as global engine of growth and recently also credited as the ‘global savior’ with major financial think tanks, crediting its vast emerging markets, especially China, India and Indonesia for leading the world out of its worst economic crisis of 2008 (IMF; 2010)[1]. In 2012 Asia and the Pacific contributed nearly 36 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP) (ADB; 2013) [2]. More notably the East Asian region accounted for approximately 40 percent of the global growth and one third of the global trade, which is claimed to be highest for any region of the world (The World Bank; 2013) [3]. China being the most important component in driving this growth by being the ‘world’s factory’ in terms of the scale of manufacturing happening here (South China Morning Post; May 2013) [4].

Shining Asia though has a dark side; in 2009, Asia accounted for about 57% of the global employment and in contrast accounted for nearly 71% of the total workers in the vulnerable sector. Asia also has the largest number of working poor, earning less than US\$ 2 a day. Almost 71% of the global working poor live and work here particularly South Asia which in absolute terms not only has more working poor than Sub-Saharan Africa but also has largest percentage of workers working in the vulnerable sector (ILO; 2011) [5].

Asia may have brought the world out of its worst economic crisis, but its workers have paid a big price, a large section of workers lost their jobs that also led to the change in employment patterns with most of the jobs offered being insecure mostly in the ‘vulnerable sector’ (ILO; 2010) [6]. In the ASEAN region, the number of working poor is believed to have risen from 140 million to 158 million people or from 51 per cent to 57 per cent of the region’s workers as a result of the economic crisis.

## Working Conditions in Global Factory

*When the fire alarm was raised we wanted to run, however, the supervisor stopped us and asked to go back to work, stating it was a false alarm. Within minutes the fire spread fast and the only exit was blocked, even the windows were bolted with steel, some workers somehow managed to break the exhaust fan and jumped from 3 floors, I even though being 4 months pregnant also jumped to save my life. I broke my leg, but my baby is fine, thankfully.”*

(Shabnam Hussain worker in Tazreen Garment factory that caught fire in November 2012) [7]

Past few decades have seen the unprecedented neo-liberal expansion of Asia leading to opening up of economies and embracing the ‘export-led’ mantra for growth. This started the infamous ‘race to bottom’ where countries compete for investments (in the form of FDI). To attract investments, labor standards are lowered; tax incentives are provided for industries, and cheap labor is offered as bait. People are dispossessed of their land and rights in their villages in China, India, Burma or Bangladesh to feed the manufacturing centers either in cities or border towns. The scale of this migration is unprecedented - the largest migration in the history of humanity. Only in China the number is estimated to be anywhere between 200 and 250 million (230 million as per the ACFTU) [8] about the two-third population of the United States.

Shabnam is among the millions of migrant workers who are at the lowest tier in the web of global supply chains that through an complicated network assemble predominantly in Asia in ‘sweatshops’ that not only expose workers to fatal hazards reflected by fires in Bangladesh, mine collapse in China and toxic exposure in electronics manufacturing in Korea.

A majority though end up working in the vast informal economy where majority of workers in Asia work – as a rickshaw puller in Dhaka, tuk tuk driver in Cambodia, waste recycler in Guiyu, China or home based worker in Philippines. Though, reshaping of work under neo-liberal reforms has also led to massive informalisation within the formal sector also. Work is no longer providing a respite from poverty but may be adding to the existing vulnerabilities (Lund, Marriot; 2011). Workers often have to make a difficult choice of having to work in a hazardous employment rather than having none and watch their families go hungry.

## Occupational Safety and Health in Asia: Scale of the Problem

Though it is often reported that Asia has dangerous working conditions that kill maims and sickens thousands of workers yet no one knows how dangerous the situation is. Ironically, it is easy to obtain the economic indicators for almost any country in the region yet no country maintains proper records, if they maintain at all, of deaths and disabilities at work. The only available regional data is from the International Labour Organization that estimates about 1.1 million work-related deaths in Asia [9]. The ILO admits that “In most countries, vast number of workplace accidents, fatalities and diseases are not even reported or recorded” (ILO; 2012). The ILO data is thus based on estimation calculated using a model and extrapolating some of the data from the industrialized countries like Finland. This is because very few countries report data to ILO, so there is a serious lack of data as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Fatalities due to work in Asia**

Region	Fatal Accidents Reported to the ILO (2003)	Fatal Accidents (2003) Estimated	Work Related Diseases (estimated)	Work related Fatalities (Estimated)
China (CHN)	180	98,000	334,000	432,000
India (IND)	179	47,000	356,000	403,000
Other Asia and Islands (OAI)	1247	81,000	270,000	351,000
Total	1606	226,000	960,000	1,186,000

Source: ILO 2008

It can be seen from the table that as per the 2003 data the annual death toll in Asia is estimated at 1.18 million workers, almost half of the global work-related fatalities. On occupational accidents two definite things emerge:

- Countries report only a fraction of the accidents compared to the estimates by the ILO, e.g. China in 2003 reported only 180 fatal accidents whereas the ILO estimated the figure to be at 98,000. Thus statistically, considering the size of working population, both India and China have lower accident rate than many of the industrialized countries.
- Accidents only represent a fraction of the problem as evident from the table. Assuming the estimation is correct, for Asia, fatal accidents only comprise about 19 percent of the total work-related fatalities, whereas a large number of workers (nearly 81 percent) are estimated to die of occupational diseases at work.

### **Occupational Diseases and Invisibility of Victims in Asia**

In a situation where 'evident' and 'visible' accidents are underreported or not reported at all, occupational diseases stand a very little chance. In fact, there is more data on 'non-availability' of data than the real data itself. However, it is well understood that a large working population in Asia is getting exposed to hazardous substances at work. Health Minister of China, Chen Zhou made an unprecedented statement in 2010 claiming that "Some 200 million Chinese workers serving more than 30 sectors have been exposed to various health hazards in the workplace on the mainland" [10]. Similarly, a recent ILO report estimates more than 900,000 deaths from exposure to hazardous substances at work (ILO; 2011). Considering Asia is a hotbed of global production, it is not hard to derive that a large proportion of these deaths would be taking place in Asia. Asia also continues to use many of the hazardous substances that have been banned in the industrialized countries including Asbestos. Despite the overwhelming exposure to the workers in Asia and estimates of the fatalities by the UN institutions, the victims remain invisible thus do not exist. Thus, one cannot talk about rights of sick and injured workers – if they do not exist. Compensation and rehabilitation become an issue only when 'existence' of the victim is recognized. In Asia, the struggle for victims is still in the 'existential question' stage.

### **Victims Organizing and the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims**

National statistics may deny their existence, yet occupational accident and disease victims do exist in enormous numbers in Asia and Victims' organizing has been one of the

most important components of labour organising in Asia, considering the rate of unionizing Asia is very low and majority of workers in Asia are not organized in any form of unions. Also, health and safety is not always a priority for the unions, so the victims and their organizations have taken center stage in the struggle for OSH rights in Asia. It followed a similar pattern of the victims' moment in 60s and 70s in the US in the form of 'Brown Lung', 'Black Lung' and the 'White Lung' victims association. Thus since early 80s victims movement started to take shape in some parts of Asia. Interestingly it started in countries that were first to embrace the 'neo-liberal industrialization' owing to the large number of workers getting sick and injured at work and included – Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong – the earliest temples of 'export-led growth. The victims groups in these countries also started to communicate with each other and thus started the beginning of an alliance.

In 1993, two major fires in Asia led to the cementing of this alliance into a broader network. The fires took place in toy factories in Bangkok, Thailand (Kader) and Shenzhen, China (Zhili) killing 188 and 87 workers respectively and injuring and scarring hundreds more. The fires were a reminder of the gruesome working conditions that prevailed in Thailand and China, who were relatively new entrants to this 'export-driven growth' saga. A majority of the dead and injured were young women, who had moved from villages to Bangkok or Shenzhen to earn some money for their families. In both cases, the fire exits were blocked, and many of the women had to jump out of windows to escape the fire, and tragically many of them died doing so. Kader fire stood as the worse 'factory' fire since the Triangle Fire of the 1911 that killed 114 workers and worse factory fire in Asia [11].

The struggle for the victims of both the fires took the center stage of the Asian Victims' movement. It also led to the formation of 'Hong Kong Toy coalition' a broad base of trade unions, NGOs and other human rights group, working for justice for the Zhili Fire Victims. It also led to the amalgamation of the network and by 1997; it took a formal shape in the form of the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Accident Victims (ANROAV). As the name reflects, the initial focus of the network was to provide support to the accident victims in Asia. Gradually ANROAV took the shape of a broader alliance and though victims groups' attained the center stage, it also included trade unions, labour NGOs, academics, other civil society organization and individuals concerned about the occupational safety and health in Asia. Since 1999, the network started to have regular meetings and soon the membership started growing, both in terms of number of members and the geographical spread.

Table 2 below gives key highlights of the network meetings since 1999. As can be seen, the network has grown considerably, with more than 50 organizations from 14 Asian countries/regions and associate membership from the United States, Canada and United Kingdom. The network changed its name to the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV) in 2010 during the Bandung Meeting to include the occupational disease and environmental victims.

### **Role of the Network: making victims visible**

*Cadmium was poisoning us, and many of us were even hospitalized. However, instead of any words of compassion, we were asked to get back to work and were not offered any compensation. Management and local government worked in collusion. We have had enough and decided to move to Beijing to get justice. We were even ready to go to the Chinese White House (President's residence) to get ourselves heard. Local officials were already waiting for us at the Beijing station, but nothing could stop us.'*

Victim of Cadmium Poisoning in China in ANROEV meeting

**Table 2: ANROAV/ANROEV meetings, 1999-2013**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Network Meeting Place</b>	<b>Key Features</b>
1999	Macau, China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial phase, conceptualization and alliance building</li> <li>• Participation from 7 Asian Countries</li> </ul>
2001	Bangkok, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In conjunction with Anniversary of Kader Fire</li> <li>• Rally in Bangkok for OSH</li> <li>• Participation from 11 Asian Countries</li> </ul>
2002	Bangkok, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In conjunction with Anniversary of Kader Fire</li> <li>• Rally in Bangkok for OSH</li> </ul>
2003	Bangkok, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kader, Identifying Joint Campaigns, Asbestos Campaign Identified</li> <li>• More than 80 participants</li> </ul>
2004	Chiangmai, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concretization of campaigns</li> <li>• Participation in Global Asbestos Congress (GAC) in Japan decided</li> </ul>
2005	Hong Kong, China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participation of Victims groups from China</li> <li>• Protest outside Jewelry Fair Hong Kong</li> <li>• Book 'Struggle for Justice Released.'</li> </ul>
2006	Bangkok, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cadmium poisoning victims from China</li> <li>• Victims exchange between India and China</li> </ul>
2007	Hong Kong, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Occupational Disease Campaigns strengthened</li> <li>• Participation from US and Canadian groups</li> </ul>
2008	Manila, Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simultaneous Workshops started like Lung Disease, Electronics, Victims Organising</li> <li>• Samsung Victims from Korea join the network</li> </ul>
2009	Phonon Penh, Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network broadens about 150 participants in meeting representing 19 countries</li> <li>• Local network in Cambodia initiated</li> <li>• Asian Ban Asbestos Network - Created</li> </ul>
2010	Bandung, Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bandung Declaration on OSH</li> <li>• Participation from European Work Hazards Network and US COSH Network</li> <li>• Name Changed to ANROEV to include disease and environment victims.</li> <li>• Imitating Joint Research on OSH</li> </ul>
2011	Jaipur, India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More than 50 victims from India join meeting</li> <li>• ABAN meeting also takes place</li> <li>• Presentation of the research findings</li> </ul>
2013	Bangkok, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Kader Fire</li> <li>• Participation from victim of Tazreen Fire Victim</li> <li>• Participation from Africa</li> <li>• Initial discussion to from Global Grassroots Network</li> </ul>

The network has played a significant role in terms of providing a platform for the grassroots victims and other OSH groups in Asia to come together and express thus making them visible. ANROEV meetings are the largest gathering of grassroots victims groups in Asia. The meetings have offered space for groups to share experiences, struggles and devise strategies for joint campaigns and struggles fostering strong solidarity movement within Asia. It also led to spontaneous collaboration between the members on specific issues leading towards concrete solidarity campaigns also evolved or joined at the global level, which will be discussed separately in detail. It also led to the formation of the country-level networks in three biggest Asian countries – ANROEV China network in China, Occupational and Environmental Health Network India (OEHNI) in India and OSH network Indonesia.

Over the years, victims in the meeting have expressed in detail the problems they face starting from their visibility. Once the worker is sick in many places, they are just told to go home to their village, where many of them die quietly. Diagnosis or lack of it is also one of the major reasons for the invisibility. Diagnosis of occupational diseases requires special skills and at a grassroots level such skilled professionals are not amiable and at times even the skilled professionals do not diagnose correctly in order to avoid liability. As a result, a large number of victims remain undiagnosed and cannot get compensation. This leads to the marginalization of the victims and their families as if the sick or dead person is the sole breadwinner for the family. Sick workers need to bear the cost of the treatment, which is on a constant increase and brings the victim and their family on the brink of poverty and destitution.

To address the invisibility the members together tried to publish books, posters and videos to get the attention of the mainstream media. In a recent publication – Invisible Victims of Development (AMRC 2012) published by the Asia Monitor Resource Centre in collaboration with the ANROEV, details the situation of six Asian countries viz. China, India, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines. The report was released in Hong Kong in April 2012 and was well received by the international media.

## Network Campaigns

Over the years, the network and its members have developed critical campaigns to address the particular hazard, industry or disease in the region and thus develop a specific strategy. The campaign leaders organize workshops during the ANROEV meetings and share the strategies and updates with all the members

### 1. Lung Disease due to Silica Dust (Silicosis)

It is one of the most prevalent yet preventable occupational diseases in the region. It is also recognized by the ILO and the WHO as one of the most serious occupational disease impacting workers in the developing world (WHO; 2007) [12]. Though there has been a joint program by the ILO and the WHO on Global Elimination of Silicosis since 1995, yet

#### **Case Study - Collaborative efforts between Informal workers of India and China**

Gujarat in India and Guangdong in China are separated by thousands of miles but have something in common- a thriving gem- polishing industry and a large section of the population is working in informal sector, home-based units in lots of places, to polish the gemstones at both the places. Both the places are facing an enormous problem of silicosis among the workers but it is worse in a place called Khambhat in Gujarat, where hundreds of workers have died in past many years, and many more are getting sick every year.

#### **Background of Gujarat and Guangdong**

In Khambhat semi-precious stone – Agate is polished that is then used in making jewellery that is then sold in the lucrative markets in India and abroad. The work process is very rudimentary that includes breaking the stone into smaller pieces manually by chippers, the small pieces of stone are then polished on a small grinding wheel where the stone is held either manually or with the help of a wooden board against the motor run grinding wheel. This is the part of the process that produces lots of dust as the whole process is a dry process, and there is no water used. This exposes workers to very high levels of dust, and many of

there seems to be a disconnect between the policies at the top and situation at the ground. In ANROEV, the silicosis campaign is led by the victims groups from China and India. In both these countries, there is an active campaign to improve the diagnosis and subsequent compensation for the victims. The following case study illustrates in detail the whole process of collaboration.

## 2. Asbestos

Asia is the largest consumer of Asbestos (Pandita; 2006) [13] with China and India two of the largest consumers within Asia. The asbestos campaign in ANROEV started with the participation in the Global Asbestos Congress (GAC) in Japan in 2004, which was organized by the Japanese members of the network-Ban Asbestos Japan Network (BANJAN), which has been leading the Ban Asbestos Campaign in ANROEV network. It also led to the crystallization of the broad 'Ban Asbestos' alliance in Asia in the form of ABAN network that was formally constituted in 2009 in Hong Kong. The key campaign for ABAN has been to promote a complete ban of asbestos in Asia. In this regard, ABAN meetings have been organized alongside the ANROEV meetings, to build the in-country Ban Asbestos movement. Such networks have been facilitated in Indonesia, Thailand and Philippines. Asia exports most of its asbestos and Canada was one of the major exporters of Asbestos to Asia and ABAN in collaboration with the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS), based in the UK, launched a major campaign against Canada, whose Quebec province was producing and exporting. In past Canada has been aggressively promoting the 'safe' use of asbestos in Asia, claiming that the white asbestos (chrysotile) is safer to use. It provided funding through the Chrysotile Institute, to promote the usage of asbestos globally.

In December 2010, The Asian Solidarity delegation consisting of victims, trade unionists and activists went to Quebec Province to lobby and appeal to the citizens of Canada, meet with the politicians and the press to urge the Quebec Government not to sanction the loan to fund the re-opening of the Jeffrey mines and to stop all production and export of asbestos to the developing Asian countries.

In 2011, the last two remaining mines in Can-

them have already died of silicosis due to the high exposure. Since most of the workplaces are also the living places of the workers, this is also exposing the other family members including young children to the deadly silica dust. The irony is that this saga of death has been going on for many years (more than ten years) and has been covered by many newspapers. The National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH) a premier OSH research institute in Ahmedabad also carried out a detailed study and also tried to provide some workplace solutions in the form of simple dust extraction systems – however none of them ever reached a proper implementation scale due to the costs involve both the installation costs and the running costs. We have to bear in mind the workers in Khambat are extremely poor and cannot afford workplace improvements even of modest costs. The traders, who make most of the money out of the trade also conveniently, choose to turn a blind eye to the whole catastrophe yet getting gems polished in this village at as many low costs involved as possible. The workers and their families seem to be trapped in this quagmire of no hope with the death of a family member not stopping the process but simply replacing the dead member by another member of the family – wife of the deceased or the son to continue the process till they also get incapacitated. Peoples Research Training Institute (PTRC), a labour NGO based in Gujarat has been involved in this region for past ten years. It has been carrying out a series of educational and awareness programmes with the workers in this region.

Guangdong, on the other hand, is the hub of gem polishing industry in China. There are many formal factory units there that export gems worth millions of US\$ and most of the gems are polished in Guangdong province. Hong Kong owners also own many factories in Guangdong, and much of the export to global market takes place through Hong Kong. Hong Kong also hosts two largest Gem and Jewellery Fair every year to attract the lucrative global buyers. The problem started few years ago when many of the workers working in the formal units were diagnosed as suffering from silicosis. However, employers were refusing to pay them any compensation, and many of the companies simply closed down and opened in some other province with different names. Some of the victims with the help of some Hong Kong labour NGOs like Labour Action China tried to push the employers, who were based in Hong Kong to pay compensation. These workers organ-

ada located in the Quebec province stopped production. With the commitment of a \$58 million dollar loan from the Quebec government in 2012, the Jeffrey mines were set to reopen. However, following a provincial election that resulted in a change of leadership to the Parti Québécois, the new Premier of Quebec Pauline Marois promised to cancel the loan and instead use the funds for economic diversification in the asbestos mining communities of Quebec [14].

### 3. Electronics

Asia is also a major hub of electronics sub-contract manufacturing employing millions of workers. Electronics is known to be hazardous industry using many harmful chemicals in its production process (Koh, Chan, Yep; 2004) [15]. The victims of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), an electronic company based in Taiwan, that exposed thousands of hazardous chemicals that led to cancers (ALU;2007) [16], have been ANROEV network. In 2008, in the Manila ANROEV meeting for the first time the victims group Supporters for the Health and Rights of People in the Semiconductor Industry (SHARPS) joined the meeting. More than 60 workers have died of cancers due to exposure to the chemicals at the Samsung semiconductor plants in Korea. This led to an intense campaign about safe electronics in general and justice for the Samsung workers in particular [17]. ANROEV has also working with the International Coalition for the Responsible Technology (ICRT) a global alliance based in San Jose, US and monitoring the pollution due to the high tech companies globally and jointly organized a Joint Strategy Meeting on Sustainable Electronic Industry in the year 2012 in Korea [18]. More recently, the network is also helping the electronics workers in other parts of Asia: Batam in Indonesia, which is an Electronic manufacturing zone and many workers have been falling sick, and Vietnam, where number of electronics manufacturing has moved exposing workers to harm.

At the policy level, the network is working closely with the ICRT to push for a strategic response from the countries towards the management of risk in the electronics industries. In this regard, the network members

ised themselves into Victims' Association and also became part of the Asian Network for The Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV). Soon the victims group realised that gem polishing in Guangdong is also carried out in very informal sector – more like home based industry. They have also started to help these units to improve their workplace so that they can prevent themselves from deadly silicosis. These victims also educate workers about the hazards due to dust. Even though the work process in Guangdong is also carried out informally in home based units, yet it is fundamentally different from the one in Khambhat, India. In Guangdong, most of the processes are wet processes, and there are relatively better tools for operation. Even though, it is not a perfect process, and there are lots of room for improvement yet it is relatively much better than one in India. The polished gems are then sold via formal units. Sometimes the formal units sub-contract some of the work to these small informal groups. They face the similar problems like no social security or any legal protection.

Both Labour Action China and Peoples Training Research Centre being members of ANROEV met in one of the ANROEV annual meetings in 2005 and spoke on the issue of silicosis. It was found that workers from China and India were facing similar problems. In 2006 Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) and Labour Action China, (LAC) organised for victim and organiser from Khambhat and Peoples Training Research Centre (PTRC) to visit Hong Kong and Guangdong. They visited some of the informal units in Guangdong province to understand the work process there. In the same year, LAC and AMRC organised a reciprocal tour where Chinese counterparts visited Khambhat in India and saw the work process there. They also participated in a two-day seminar on Silicosis in India where they met different NGOs and local government agencies. The Chinese Victims' group was surprised to see the mode of production in India and was ready to provide help. PTRC since then has been trying to follow up with the Chinese and Indian groups to develop the industry in Khambhat, so the hazard is reduced.

On Indian side, PTRC is trying to get the workers in India to form some sort of cooperative and exploring possibilities to raise some seed funds either from local government or some other means so that they can set up a model unit based on Guangdong experience. Such units can be replicated and locally produced and modified in future.

attended the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), a UN policy framework to foster the sound management of chemicals, meeting in Vienna in 2011 [19]. The aim of meeting was to develop a series of comprehensive recommendations for cooperative action that would call the world's governments and industry to address the hazardous life cycle of the electronics industry in three distinct areas: (1) design, (2) production and use, and (3) end of life.

#### 4. Victims Organising

“I was picked among a mass of bodies, with more than 80% of burns on my body. It took years of reconstructive surgeries to get me in a sort of shape. I could have lived like a helpless victim, but I decided to fight for others like me, so that they get their rights, and no one has to go through what I endured.”

Xiaoying, survivor of the Zhili fire and coordinator the China network speaking in European Work Hazards Network meeting in Leeds, UK in 2010

This has been one of the key campaigns of the networks. It is strongly believed and recognized that the way out of invisibility and marginalization is to organize actively. ANROEV provides a strong platform regionally to promote sustainable victims' organizations that can transform the 'helpless victims' to the active agency of change. Xioying has been inspiring other victims not only in China but in other parts of Asia, where victims organizing is still difficult. This includes victims exchange during the network meeting and also during the meetings. Members of stronger victims' movement provide help and support to countries that have evolving victims' movement, more recently Bangladesh, where catastrophic fire and building collapse has injured thousands.

#### **Conclusion: Towards a Global Grassroots Network**

The network has membership from similar networks in Europe and US and the Asian network members join the meetings of the European and US counterparts. It has also built systematically into a strong solidarity networks. In the recent Asian network meeting in Bangkok, 2013, ANROEV members proposed the formation of a global grassroots network that would bring tougher the global grassroots movement and make their voice even stronger. In principle, the proposal has agreed both by the European and the US networks, however, to make it truly global it also needs members from Africa and Latin America which would be its next task.

At the policy level, there have been many promises made to improve health and safety, starting with a Beijing declaration [20] of “Occupational Safety for all” in 1994 by the World Health Organization. International Labor Organization in 2008, also makes similar promises in a nicely worded ‘Seoul Declaration’ [21] that “calls for a preventative safety and health culture, which gives the right to a safe and healthy environment and which is respected at all national levels”. However at ground level it seems nothing has changed, despite these wonderful promises. Two decades after the deadly fires of Kader and Zhili, we have seen even worse fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Though these international UN bodies seem to have membership from the states, yet there is the exclusion of the main beneficiaries in this decision-making process- the victims and the workers who are getting exposed. The complete failure of health and safety at all levels is because of failure of grassroots democracy; the where absence of unions, the working class has almost no representation at any level of the decision-making process. Moreover, the impacted population and the victims, who are marginalized in this process, do not have any democratic space to express them-

selves. In this regard, the victims organizing and the Asian network play an important role in bringing the voices of the impacted workers to the surface. They have realized the only themselves can change their situation, and all they need is some space, where they can exert and express themselves. The network has helped them in this process by providing them some platform and they are leading what has a potential to become a global solidarity network.

## Endnotes

- 1) Regional Economic Outlook; Asia and Pacific Leading the Global Recovery Rebalancing for the Medium Term; International Monetary Fund 2010
- 2) Key Indicator for Asia and the Pacific 2013; Asian Development Bank, 2013
- 3) Rebuilding policy buffers, reinvigorating growth; The World Bank; 2013
- 4) See <http://www.scmp.com/business/china-business/article/1237165/china-churns-out-top-ratings-worlds-factory>
- 5) Global Labour Trends 2011, International Labour Organisation
- 6) Labour and social trends in ASEAN 2010: sustaining recovery and development through decent work, International Labour Organisation,; 2010,
- 7) Based on author's interview with the victim in January 2013, in Ashulya near Dhaka, Bangladesh, the name has been changed to protect the identity of the worker.
- 8) See [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-01/24/content\\_21806059.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-01/24/content_21806059.htm)
- 9) Beyond death and injuries: The ILO's role in promoting safe and Healthy jobs, available at [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms\\_094524.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_094524.pdf)
- 10) See [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-11/11/content\\_21318244.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2010-11/11/content_21318244.htm)
- 11) However, in 2002 almost 20 years later, similar fires broke in Pakistan, Ali Garments and Bangladesh, Tazreen, killing 289 and 117 workers respectively.
- 12) [http://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/newsletter/gohnet12e.pdf](http://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/newsletter/gohnet12e.pdf)
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- 15) <http://oem.bmj.com/content/61/2/180.full>
- 16) [http://www.amrc.org.hk/alu\\_article/occupational\\_health\\_and\\_safety/rca\\_the\\_unacceptable\\_face\\_of\\_capitalism\\_in\\_taiwan](http://www.amrc.org.hk/alu_article/occupational_health_and_safety/rca_the_unacceptable_face_of_capitalism_in_taiwan)
- 17) [http://www.eetimes.com/document.asp?doc\\_id=1173190](http://www.eetimes.com/document.asp?doc_id=1173190)
- 18) [http://www.icrt.co/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=137:sustainable-electronics-meeting-report&catid=87:campaigns&Itemid=539](http://www.icrt.co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=137:sustainable-electronics-meeting-report&catid=87:campaigns&Itemid=539)
- 19) The report is available at [http://www.icrt.co/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=104:ngo-report-on-saicm-meeting-on-hazardous-substances&catid=76&Itemid=530](http://www.icrt.co/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=104:ngo-report-on-saicm-meeting-on-hazardous-substances&catid=76&Itemid=530)
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**Asian Labour Update (ALU)** is published electronically  
by the Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong

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