Thousand-strong women’s march demand justice amid worsening multiple crises

March 8, Manila – More than a thousand women activists marched to Mendiola Bridge, highlighting deepening poverty and demanding just solutions to the energy, climate and economic crises. Demanding accountability at the doorstep of the Marcos Jr. presidency, they slammed the BBM administration’s pursuit of crises-exacerbating policies and programs, and inaction over the unabated deterioration of health, livelihoods, jobs and the environment.

“Women’s emancipation is central to the fight for energy, climate and fiscal justice, and the very transformation of the current economic system that has created and is driving the multiple crises to greater heights,” said Lidy Nacpil, Coordinator of the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD), expressing solidarity with women burdened by daily labors but are also at the forefront of protest and resistance. Protest actions were also held today by APMDD members in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Indonesia.

Various organizations marched and gathered at Mendiola Bridge, a short distance from the official residence of the Philippine president, bearing streamers and placards slamming debt service burdens and regressive taxes burdens, while the climate and energy crisis intensify.

In Nepal, Member of Parliament Sujita Shakya urged governments to examine the debts being claimed: “At a time of multiple crises, we should stop payments for illegitimate or questionable debts that did more damage than good, and shifting public funds towards realizing women’s needs and human rights.” Shakya is also an officer of the All-Nepal Women’s Alliance. Nepal’s needs around US$4.4 billion to finance the Sustainable Development Goals, one of which is gender equality.

Send stories, updates, photos, and other contributions to debtmonitor.apmdd@gmail.com
The Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee (PKRC) called for debt cancellation and protested the conditionalities that come with seeking help from the International Monetary Fund. “Women bear the consequences of austerity impositions such as cuts in budgets for social services. Up to now, they are still rebuilding homes and livelihoods from last year’s flooding catastrophe. Our people and women in particular, contributed the least to the climate crisis, but suffer the extreme impacts of the multiple crises including that of climate,” said Saima Zia of PKRC.

In Indonesia, Titi Soentoro, Executive Director of Aksi! for Gender, Social and Ecological Justice said, “The Indonesian government is looking to borrow a total of US$7 billion from multilateral organizations including the ADB, AIIB, World Bank and Japan International Cooperation Agency. But these have proven incapable of overcoming crises and transforming economic and social systems, and burdensome for women and girls. Gender equality adorn the websites of these institutions, but they often turn out to be hollow aspirations only.”

APMDD marks International Women’s Day, March 8, every year as part of its mandate. It reiterates the commitment to fight the multiple crises now felt harshly particularly by poor and working women in caught in economic recessions, heavier debt and tax burdens, climate breakdown, conflict and violence.

“The challenges are enormous. Much is demanded from women who are burdened but who also refuse to give up,” said Nacpil.

“We are rising not only to claim the gains we’ve won on gender equality but for a better, more just and equitable world.” •

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Philippines

Pakistan
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The call to examine the public debt – a legacy of debt dependence by the Marcos Sr. administration and carried through by successive Philippine administrations – echoed last February 21 from leaders and respected individuals coming together as a commission for the Philippine Citizens Debt Audit.

The national government debt now stands at P13.5 trillion, as last reported by the Bureau of Treasury. Through the Citizens Debt Audit, the commissioners aim to empower Filipinos to dig into our public debt, disentangling the web of unsustainable debt levels and the burden they impose on ordinary citizens.

Launched in Quezon City, Philippines to examine the increasingly ballooning public debt of the country, they also pressed for the repeal of a Marcos Sr. law that allows automatic appropriation of funds for debt service, without benefit of public consultations and regardless of more urgent survival needs today of the Filipino people.

“Debt audits are critical towards shaping and transforming policies on unsustainable debts and debt payments, as well as borrowing policies. They can also serve as bases to call for changes in the policies of lenders,” said Lidy Nacpil, coordinator of the Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD). “Filipinos are struggling to survive in the face of multiple crises. Examining the public debt through a debt audit can identify loans that should not be paid, and open opportunities for shifting public money from debt service to people’s needs especially in these extremely difficult times.”

Dr. Rene Ofreneo, current president of the Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC) and Professor Emeritus of the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations scored the Automatic Appropriations policy for curtailing citizens’ rights to information and participation in debt governance and management. “These public debts were and continue to be incurred in the name of the Filipino people. We are also the ones shouldering debt service payments, whether through taxes or cuts in public expenditures for health, education, job creation and other needs. Yet, we only get to know what debts were contracted after the deed is done, and then bear the consequences for debt-funded projects that may have violated human rights or destroyed environments.”

An example of a questionable loan is the New Centennial Water Source-Kaliwa Dam Project (NCWS-KDP), funded by a loan agreement with onerous conditions. These include costly repayment terms and a waiver of immunity by the Philippine government in case lenders file for arbitration, which practically holds hostage the Philippines’ sovereignty.

Renewing efforts to bring national gov’t debt under public scrutiny and shift payments away from questionable loans to support people’s needs and survival
APMDD joins 2023 Global Protest to Fight Inequality

APMDD members from across Asia mobilized to join Fight Inequality Alliance’s (FIA) 2023 Global Protest to Fight Inequality last January 18 and 20 to call for “Peoples’ Recovery and System Change to End Inequality”.

Grassroots organizations and movements from around the world held mobilizations to decry the hypocrisy of the world’s wealthiest individuals, richest corporations and political elites gathered in this year’s World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting at Davos, Switzerland to ostensibly tackle “tangible, system-positive change for the long term.”

Rallying to the global call, APMDD members in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and the Philippines staged demonstrations to advance the demand for system change.

The alliance drew attention to the “staggering wealth inequality in the world” as it called for “people’s recovery” and system change in its statement. It cited a recent study by Oxfam showing that two-thirds of the wealth created around the world since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has gone to the world’s richest 1%.

APMDD further linked rising inequality to the worsening of multiple crises in climate, energy transition, Global South debt, high prices for basic goods and services, poor working and living conditions, education, healthcare, and many others.

Demands echoed in the various public actions held for cancellation of illegitimate debts and reshifting of debt repayments to social spending, curbing illicit financial flows, scrapping regressive taxes and adopting a wealth tax, among others. ▪