

Performance of Persistence: A March for Gender Justice in Climate Justice

by Nina Somera

Despite the midday showers, more than three hundred people led by indigenous women joined the women's march on 1 October 2009, heading to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) building in Bangkok, Thailand.

Chanting “No Climate Justice without Gender Justice”, the participants, mostly coming from Armenia, Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand stressed that women are among the hardest hit by climate change despite their minute carbon footprint. Moreover, they demanded the meaningful engagement of women in the climate talks.

One of these women was Aleta Kornika Baun, one of the scores of Indonesian indigenous women affected by the lucrative mining industries. “Mining cleared the forests of trees and now causes periodic erosions. Today, we walk for at least two kilometers just to fetch water. If we allow mining, the number of women victims will keep on rising,” she lamented.

Another was Elvie Baladad of the Pambansang Koalisyon ng Kababaihan sa Kanayunan (PKKK) or the Philippine National Rural Women Coalition. She owns an orchard of some 300 mango trees that are expected to yield about 6,000 kilos. But in her last harvest, she only managed to collect 300 kilos.

“I’m still paying my debt, with the devastation brought about by insect infestation, which in turn is brought about by climate change. We have a crazy weather, as crazy as those inside who would not want to reduce their carbon emissions and who are responsible for messing up our climate. I blame the countries especially the United States (US). In pursuit of development, it has trampled those who have less in life,” she expressed.



Northern women likewise joined the women's march. US-based Felicia Marie Davis, who came at her own expense, hoped to learn from the politics and energy of Asian women who have strongly articulated the links between gender and climate change.

As she explained, "I came on my own resources to see and hear first hand how Asian women represent gender in climate change discussions, showing that gender and climate are connected and connected globally. I can connect what happened in the Philippines to hurricane Katrina where more women died. Women from the developing worlds are truly taking the leadership in this issue especially in terms of equity."

During the march, some women participants periodically danced to the drumbeats, with their red umbrellas, batik banners and placards shaped like the Venus sign. Such fusion of energies, at once serious yet creative, drew the attention of passersby. Just before the march, the participants were thrilled to see four motor boats of SEAFish for Justice plying the Chao Phraya river and heading towards the park beside the Phra Sumen Park.

At the end, the women reiterated their call for accountability particularly among developed nations as well as women's meaningful participation in both formal and informal processes.

As Baladad asserted, "We call for reparations that are free of conditionalities. They owe it to us, our children and the next generation." Farjana Akter of Voice of Bangladesh added, "Women must be present in decision-making on adaptation programmes." Finally Baun remarked, "Women and men must work together. We need to learn from our traditions. We have to think of ourselves as friends of the environment." ■



The Women's March

Clockwise: (1) Four motor boats of SEAFish for Justice greeted the women as the latter was about to march from Phra Sumen Park, along the Chao Phraya River. (2 and 3) Elaborate batik banners articulated the women's key messages. (4) Several women from Indonesia's Solidaritas Perempuan were among those who led the "umbrella dance" at strategic points during the march. (5) Some women carried the equally striking Venus sign placards that called for gender justice in climate justice. Photos courtesy of Mongkhonsawat Luangvorapant of Oxfam and Titi Soentoro and Lala Pecson Cantillo of NGO Forum on the ADB.



Mongkhonsawat Luangvorapant/Oxfam



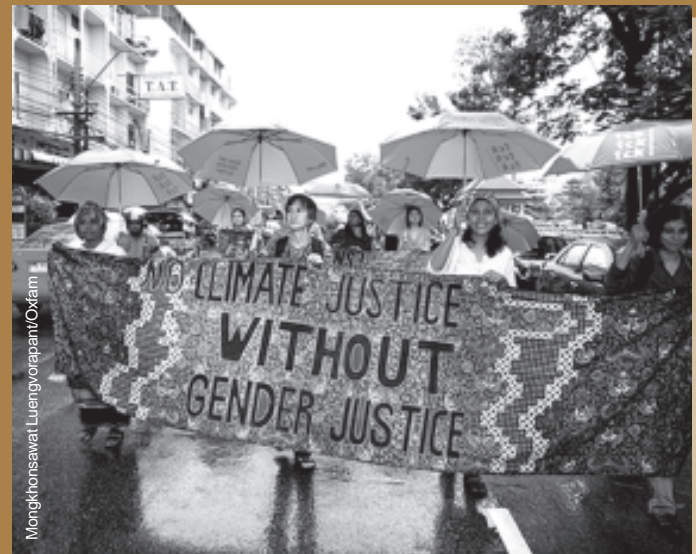
Titi Soentoro



Mongkhonsawat Luengvorapant/Oxfam



Lala Pecson Cantillo



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