



SEMINAR ON 'IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND GENDER EQUALITY'

Demanding reflections of women's rights in International trade negotiations

SHAILA SHAHID

UNI-POLARITY of the world system and consequent threat from the first world endangering the sustainability of the third world nations, makes the situation more vulnerable, owing to reluctance exhibited by the developed nations to abide by various human rights covenants. With increasing poverty and malnutrition among the millions the fact today show that the present regime of neo-liberal corporate globalisation has not brought about the prosperity that it had claimed it would. Speakers at the seminar agreed that the key agents of the new global economy are the transnational corporations, which are depicted as the supreme incarnation of market freedom owing to their superior ability to bring about the most efficient mix of land, labour, capital and technology. The international seminar on "Impact of International Trade on Gender Equality" was held on 16-17 June at hotel Purbani, Dhaka organised by Karmojib Nari and sponsored by Royal Norwegian Embassy. Representatives of international trade and gender activists, grass roots organisations, trade union federations, women's rights organisations, social movements, media and academia were presented at the event to share their knowledge and experience for developing a collective strategy for the organisations in Bangladesh.

At the inaugural session prominent women's activist and leader of women's movement Shirin Akhter of Karmojib Nari was presented and spoke about the impact of international trade rule over the women and she warned everybody that it is the time to remind the governments of their responsibility towards the most marginalized and vulnerable like women workers. Trude Gjeldvik of Norwegian Embassy in Bangladesh gave her welcome speech and she stated that more than a decade Karmojib Nari is playing a crucial role in generating awareness and campaigns around the country concerning the women workers rights as she presented at the seminar as special guest. Often women become the victims of trade violations of human rights, she stressed and also give importance for economic independence and self-reliant of women as women are the main contributor in export oriented industry. Ms. Natividad Bernardino from IGTN-Asia, Philippines and Sarbani Bhattacharya of West Bengal Commission for women , India presented their key note paper at the inaugural session. Ziaul Hoque Mukta, director research and advocacy of Karmojib Nari gave a brief description of arranging the seminar. While talking about the corporate globalisation he explained that the neo-liberal economic policy, as an ideology is the main driving force behind corporate globalisation. Tasnimma Hossain, former Member of Parliament and editor Anannya also spoke at the inaugural session of the seminar.

The two-day seminar was divided into five different sessions. They are: inauguration, Impact of trade rule on gender equality, International trade rule, national legislation and women, Trade and minimum wage: women's concerns and Trade and health services: women's concerns.

Karmojib Nari since its inception has been working on labour and women issues. It recognizes international trade rule and policy as well as one of the most dominant channels of corporate globalisation that can bring additional changes and opportunities to gender equality. The main objectives of the seminar was:

-How multilateral trade rules affect gender relations.

-Which are the policy issues that could be addressed at grass roots level, national and interna-

tional trade-policy arena and -What the NGOs, trade unions, women organisations, and human rights organisations can do at grass roots, national and international level to influence multilateral trade rules.

The session "Impact of trade rule on gender equality" was moderated by Mr. Mahfuzullah of Centre for sustainable development. Mr. Shahidullah of KN presented the paper of Palash Kantu Das of Oxfam-GB and discussed the topic of non agricultural market access. While speaking at the seminar Farida Akhter from Ubinig expressed her great concern for imposing the patent on life forms and she demanded that patent on life for m should be excluded from the TRIPS agreement of WTO. Anannya Raihan of D-net Bangladesh discussed about the general agreements on trade in services and Sabrina Verma from South centre, Switzerland spoke on the Mode 4 of the GATS systems.

Dr. Debjani Sengupta, Professor, Department of sociology, University of Kalyani, West Bengal, India presented her paper in the session titled "International trade rule, national legislation and women". She said that women are terribly being exploited all around the world, at home by patriarchy, in jobs by male partners and by unfair trade rule imposed by foreign companies. The session was moderated by Syeda Rizwana Hasan of BELA. Mabel Au from People's alliance on World Trade Organisation (WTO), Hongkong, China said in her speech that the mainstream propaganda is that more trade means more jobs, therefore it is no harm to open more market for foreign investment but in reality we see different scenario. She emphasized basically women's participation in labour market. The main difficulties that usually women faces in labour market that are: gendered wage gap, sectors and job segregation, discrimination on married women and mother, responsibility as family caretaker and inflexible working arrangement in mainstream operation.

Dr. Halida Hanum, managing director, Health promotion ltd. and Dr. Naila Khan spoke at the session of "Trade and health services: Women's concerns". The seminar concluded by a media briefing. All the participants of the seminar agree that though WTO and different transnational companies becomes the supreme authority of global trade governance but the larger society like political party, labour organisations, peasant organisations, human rights organisations and civil society lacking sufficient awareness on multi-lateral trade rules. Although multilateralism was the main emphasized, the seminar tends to focus on both bilateral and multilateral trade issues. Also it tries to draw attention on the ongoing round of negotiations of the WTO. It is really a matter of concern that this kind of international trade negotiations must consider the gender dimension of trade, since development is not an economic or trade phenomenon only but encompasses a complex network of socio-cultural phenomena.

The objective of the seminar was to develop a common understanding and shared position towards bilateral and multilateral trade issues, to develop a collective strategy and most importantly to find spaces for women. Karmojib Nari believes that the philosophers have interpreted the world in many ways but the main challenge is to change it and hence it is the time to build our capacity to change the unfair trade rule of dominant world order.

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It takes courage to be a refugee

As ordinary people living peaceful lives, we rarely have to put our courage to the test. Refugees are ordinary people, too, except that through no fault of their own, they find themselves in extraordinary circumstances. As such, they are often required to dig deep into their own inner sources of strength in order, as another dictionary puts it, to find "the ability to overcome fear".

Initially, that fear may be the immediate one of trying to escape the horrors of war and persecution, the pain of losing homes and loved ones, and the ordeal of flight. Later comes the deeper anxiety of uncertainty the worry of how to rebuild their lives, either in completely new circumstances, or back home where they now may not be welcome.

It takes courage to be a refugee. Courage not to give up hope and to make the most of the hand that has been dealt. Courage to start a new life against daunting odds, eventually to become contributing and enriching members of society once more.

Over the past five and a half decades, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has had the privilege and the responsibility of helping more than 50 million uprooted people worldwide rebuild their lives. Throughout UNHCR's proud history, they have been constantly inspired by the incredible courage of the refugees we help and protect.

While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage -- the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.

That is why the word has been chosen "Courage" as the theme of this year's World Refugee Day on June 20th, when we pay tribute to the indomitable spirit of tens

of millions of refugees and displaced who have overcome enormous loss and hardship to start anew.

The international community must also do more for the world's estimated 20-25 million internally displaced persons people who have fled their homes, generally because of conflict or persecution, but who remain in their country of origin and therefore are not legally classified as refugees. Obviously, such legal distinctions make little sense to those internally displaced civilians who have been forced from their homes and who face the same problems as refugees. As part of a collaborative U.N. effort, UNHCR currently includes more than 4.4 million internally displaced persons among its 17 million people of concern.

Once their immediate needs are met, UNHCR pursues one of three durable solutions for refugees. The preferred solution is repatriation -- voluntarily returning home once the necessary conditions are in place. Second is local integration in the country of first asylum. And last is resettlement to a third country, possibly far away from one's native land. Whether returning to your devastated homeland or starting life anew in a strange country, embarking on any one of these solutions also takes real courage. Yet millions of refugees are making these brave choices, rebuilding their homelands or bringing new life, vitality and rich cultural diversity to their adopted communities.

Thus, on this World Refugee Day, let us take time to recognize and draw inspiration from these ordinary people who have shown such extraordinary courage -- the world's millions of refugees and displaced.

Source: UNHCR



LAW events

World Refugee Day observed

DR. UDDATTA BIKASH

The World Refugee Day (WRD), 20 June was celebrated in Bangladesh through elaborate programmes. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) organized programmes in Dhaka and in Cox's Bazar. Also, Liberation War Museum and Rainbow Film Society organized discussion programme and documentary film show to mark the day.

This year's theme of the WRD is:

"Courage". It takes courage to be a refugee. Courage not to give up hope and to make the most of the hand that has been dealt. Courage to start a new life against daunting odds, eventually to become contributing and enriching members of society once more.

A special UN General Assembly Resolution, unanimously adopted on 4 December 2000, designated 20 June as the World Refugee Day in solidarity with the Africa Refugee Day.

In his WRD message the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Mr. Antonio Guterres said "While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage -- the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives."

Ahead of the WRD, UNHCR paid tribute to the indomitable spirit of tens of millions of refugees and displaced who have been struggling to overcome enormous loss and hardship to start a new.

In the morning of 20 June, the UNHCR Representative in Bangladesh, Mr. Christopher Beng Cha Lee in his brief speech at the inaugural session appreciated the role of the people and Government of Bangladesh for hosting the refugees from the Northern Rakhine State of Myanmar. Mr. Lee urged the

Government to be more pro-active in finding durable solutions for the rest of the remaining refugees from Myanmar. The UNHCR Representative also urged the Government of Bangladesh to solve the long due problem of the Stateless people in Bangladesh. He also underlined the role of the international community in this regard.

In Cox's Bazar, the UNHCR's Sub-Office organized a rally, discussion on refugees' rights, art and essay competition for refugee children, exhibition of self-help, video show, cultural programme and prize distribution in the two refugee camps named Nayapara and Kutupalong in Cox's Bazaar district. Refugees, representatives from the Government, UNHCR,

World Food Programme (WFP), Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) etc. attended the programmes.

Cox's Bazaar Environment Journalists' Forum organized another discussion on "Rohingya Refugee: Our Duties and Responsibilities" where Professor Mustaque Ahmed, Former Principle of Ramu College was the main speaker. Mr. Aminul Islam, Additional Deputy Commissioner (General and Development) was chief guest while Mr. Syed Mahmud Belal Haider, TNO, Cox's Bazaar Sadar, Advocate Mr. Mohammad Jahangir, Former President of Cox's Bazaar Bar Association, Ms. Soo-Jin Rhee from UNHCR etc. were discussants. It was presided over by Md. Nurul

Islam, President of the Forum.

Currently, the number of the Persons of Concern to UNHCR globally is 19.2 million. Among them, 9.2 millions are refugees. The rest are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, stateless persons, and returnees.

According to the international human rights instruments, and indeed the Bangladesh Constitution, refugees are entitled to have the right to life, liberty and security of person; right to seek and enjoy asylum; right to be recognized as a person before the law; right to education; right to participate in the cultural life of a community; freedom from torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; freedom from slavery or servitude;

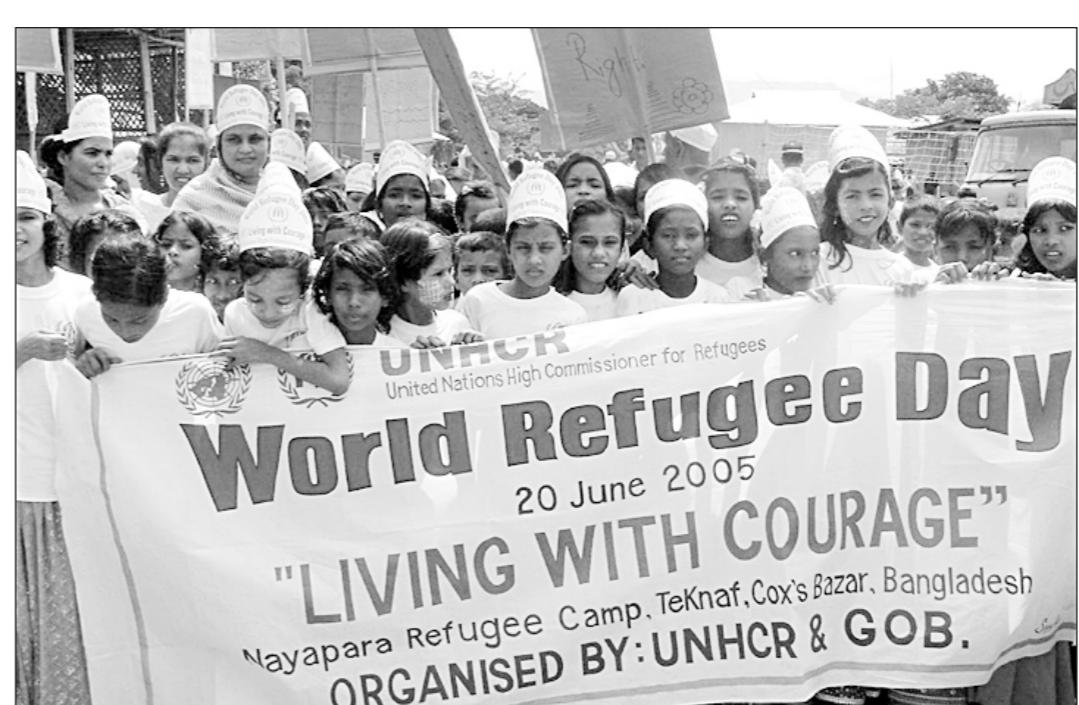
freedom of opinion and expression; freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention; and freedom from arbitrary interference in privacy, home and family. UNHCR's protection activities include ensuring these rights.

Upon the request of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, UNHCR commenced its operation in Bangladesh on 13 February 1992; and an MOU was signed on 12 May 1993. Since then, UNHCR has been providing international protection and assisted the Government of Bangladesh in the voluntary repatriation of 236,000 of the 250,000 refugees (mainly Muslims) from the Northern Rakhine state of Myanmar. Currently, there are 20,544 refugees in two restricted camps in Cox's Bazaar. UNHCR is struggling to find a suitable durable solution for these refugees.

Beyond the camp refugees, there are 158 Mandate Refugees from Myanmar (non-Rohingya), Iran, Somalia and Sierra Leon. The national NGO, Dhaka Ashana Mission is involved in the provision of services for these urban refugees and registration of asylum seekers for Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process.

From the outset of the refugee operation, UNHCR has played an important role in community improvement and development activities in the refugee hosting areas. The agency has constructed and undertaken a number of projects in the villages around the camps in Cox's Bazaar, benefiting the local population, especially in the education and health sectors.

The writer is a human rights researcher and freelance journalist.



LAW week

Mosharraf quits over Niko car controversy

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain resigned over the Tk 1 crore Lexus scam after the prime minister asked him to stand down. His resignation letter was forwarded to the president on acceptance by the prime minister. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia asked Mosharraf to explain his position on the luxurious car he had received from Canadian company Niko Resources blamed for the Trentatila Gas Field Explosion early January, sources said.

Unsatisfied with his explanation, the prime minister asked him to resign.

Mosharraf, who was convicted of corruption in the previous BNP regime, resigned on health grounds, the sources added. Although an investigation committee clearly blamed Niko that sealed the unsolicited deal in Bangladesh using political lobby in the "alternative power house" of the government, it has not been punished or penalised so far.

The Trentatila blowout damaged at least 10

billion cubic feet (BCF) of gas worth \$2.5 million, apart from severely damaging the geological zone. Instead of punishing Niko and its drilling contractor, who is backed by the "alternative power house", the minister punished the managing director of Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (Bapex).

BAPEX is the partner of Niko in the country's one and only joint venture agreement in the gas exploration and development sector. The agreement was signed in defiance of the resistance and reservations by Petrobangla experts. A Petrobangla evaluation found Niko disqualified to explore or develop gas fields during the second round block bidding in 1997. *The Daily Star*, June 19.

2 JCD men held after mugging Tk 12 lakh

Police arrested two Dhaka College students and pro-BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists of the college unit and seized a car on charge of mugging Tk 12 lakh in Motijheel.

They are Golam Obab Liton, science and technology affairs secretary of the Dhaka College

JCD unit, and Azizul Haq, a member. Dhamondi police said they seized Tk 10 lakh and 30,000 Saudi rial from room No. 212 of International Hostel at Dhaka College.

The arrestees admitted their fellow student and Assistant General Secretary Ruhul Amin had escaped with the stolen money and firearms, said Duty Officer of Motijheel Police Station ASI Abdul Rahim. Earlier, the three JCD men forced Abul Kashem, employee of Umar Jewellers at Baitul Mokarram Mosque Market, into the car in Purana Paltan, police and witnesses said. Kashem was going to a bank to deposit the sum. The muggers drove off towards Motijheel when an on-duty constable stopped the car at Dainik Bangla intersection, suspecting something wrong inside. Police rushed to the spot and held Liton and Azizul with a bullet and seized the car. However, Ruhul and Abul Hasan, driver of the car, fled. *Prothom Alo*, June 20.

Grabbers filling up yet another city wetland

Just beside the Martyred Intellectuals' Monument at Rayerbazar in the capital, local brick

and sand traders are filling up a canal known as "Hikkar Khal." Filling up of this canal and wetland along the Dhaka Flood Protection Embankment may cause waterlogging in Mohammadpur, Basila, Rayerbazar and Dhamondi areas in rainy season, locals say. While visiting the area last Thursday, this correspondent found a local guy named Mohammad Alamgir supervising the land filling work at Hikkar Khal. When asked, Alamgir claimed that he is the owner of the land.

"We possess this property for three generations and we have the documents. We are filling it up to set up a wholesale centre of brick and sand," he said. The canal is being filled up with garbage. The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) staff are selling the garbage instead of dumping in the selected dumping site. Indiscriminate filling up of wetlands in and around the capital has become rampant due to lack of monitoring by the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakha (Rajuk).

The wetlands are being filled up one after another. Now the wetlands in the suburb area are sold at Tk 4/5 lakh per katha. Influential people are grabbing this land and filling them up, locals say. *The Daily Star*, June 21.

Contempt Charge Judge, accused, PP, seek HC apology

A Dhaka court judge, a public prosecutor (PP), and the sacked managing director (MD) of Inqlab TV appeared in person before the High Court to face contempt charges, and tendered unconditional apologies for the offence.

The court fixed July 4 as the date for passing the judgement in the contempt proceedings. The HC division bench of Justices Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Emdadul Haq Azad issued a suo motu contempt rule on the three on May 16 after the sacked MD was granted bail in a sedition case in a lower court when the matter was still pending with the HC.

Following the court order, the three appeared in person before the court on May 24, and stood in the dock for about two hours.

Again Judge Mohammad Shamsul Alam Khan of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, PP Abdurrahman Hassan, and MD Salauddin Shoaib Chowdhury were in the dock for about two hours. When the three offered unconditional apologies in writing, the court exempted the judge and the PP from appearing in person.

The Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court on April 30 granted Shoaib bail in the sedition case filed on January 24 last year. The bail was set at a bond of Tk 1 lakh with four guarantors. The PP did not oppose the bail petition despite the prosecution lawyer.

The Daily Star, June 21.

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