
The World March of Women: strengthening the struggle

For WRM the women's struggle is a struggle for freedom and social justice. It is essentially a demand for changes in the social structures that have placed women in an unequal and subordinate position. Thus, the fight for gender justice becomes a social struggle against the dominant capitalist and patriarchal system that treats women and nature in a similar way exerting violence against women's bodies and lives to control them, and against communal goods such as water, land, sovereignty and even culture in its insatiable quest for profit and appropriation.

The World March of Women (WMW) is one of the actors within the social movements struggling for gender justice. It is a movement of women from various backgrounds and affiliations who are organized in grassroots groups and organizations that fight for the elimination of the causes of poverty among and violence against women, causes that they identify as inherent to the present capitalist and patriarchal system.

The actions of the groups that constitute the WMW revolve around both a feminist agenda and the demands of other social movements. Thus, the WMW is part of the struggles against militarisation, free trade or the false solutions to climate change and the systemic crisis.

On 21 -25 November 2011, under the slogan "Women on the March: Strengthening Collective Action, Changing the World", 80 women coming from 34 countries including delegates, workers and guest allied movements met for the 8th WMW International Meeting, which was held in Quezon City, Philippines in order to analyze the current situation and discuss strategies.

The text for debate prepared by the WMW International Committee for the 8th International Meeting (1) conveys the idea that the struggle for women's integrity is a struggle for social justice and human rights. It reflects that "the financial crisis, unemployment and debt levels in Northern countries opened up space for a questioning of the current model and neoliberal discourse, and for an increase in social mobilizations. Nevertheless, neoliberal policies are kept in place. The same neoliberal 'solutions' to the crisis prevail, from cutting public spending and attacking the rights of women workers, to maintaining levels of corporate greed, including financial business and military expenditure. Pressure is growing on 'real assets', such as land and real estate, resulting in landgrabbing of peasant, indigenous, and traditional lands, and the stalling of urban reform."

Regarding the role of women, the document analyses how "the work done by women, in its multiple possible forms, is at the centre of the economic and market organisation of our societies in the capitalist, racist and patriarchal system. Women are to this day primarily responsible for care-work at home, in their communities or in the service sector, thus reproducing the model which has been historically designated to them by the capitalist and patriarchal society. Women are present in greater numbers than men in the kinds of work that sustain entire communities, such as agricultural and peasant production, artisan fishing or small-scale manufacture. They are also more active in economic production and sectors that depend on intensive labour-force within today's globalised market, such as the dressmaking and shoe industries and agro-exportation."

Sexual division of labour attributes productive work (production of merchandise) to men, and reproductive work (caring for people) to women, establishing a hierarchy in which the former is more important than the latter. The document highlights how the present neoliberal capitalist model "subjects care-work, human relationships and the organisation of work and consumption to the rules of the market, which aim to increase profit through efficiency and effectiveness within the current neoliberal phase of capitalism. This is particularly evident in the privatisation of common goods, such as public health services, education and water distribution. Given the pre-planned weakening and non-existence of public and community care services (for children, the ill or elderly, etc), women find themselves working long hours without remuneration, individually fulfilling tasks that are historically invisible and without salaries." Even in the debate around the crisis women remain invisible: "male unemployment is highlighted, while the fact that women have only kept their jobs because their insertion in the labour market has always been based on less rights and lower wages is ignored."

Violence is another tool for women's control and the document refers to sexual harassment used by men to control women's work in sweatshops as well as sexual violence to punish women that demand their rights and to spread terror. Such violence has increased with the present growing militarization in all continents as a way of strengthening control over territories (including water, agricultural land, mineral resources and biodiversity) which has included rape and persecution against women who are involved in social movements.

Regarding to the environmental crisis, the WMW International Committee's document highlights how the market is presented as a solution such as the 'right' to pollute, transformed in carbon market credits that then are negotiated on the stock market. The REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) mechanism has also been considered by the document which concludes that REDD projects increase the power of governments, private companies and some big NGOs as it necessarily takes over forest control, dismissing and excluding the original peoples who have lived there for generations.

The WMW calls women to strengthen political action in order to reclaim not only women's territories - their body and their land - but also water, biodiversity and the culture of those people living in these territories for generations.

The meeting ended with a colorful international mass rally demanding to end violence against women which, in the Philippines, includes the removal of US military bases.

(1) Article based on the text produced by the International Committee of the WMW for debate at the 8th International Meeting, <http://www.worldmarchofwomen.org/structure/8rencontre/context/en/>