Dear WMW,

Greetings from WISE!

We the NCBs, and social activists in Pakistan extend our solidarity with the workers of the world especially the victims of Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh.

The views were expressed during an online meeting organized by Women in Struggle for Empowerment (WISE); the topic was **People Before Profit:** **“Understanding Corporate Power and Impunity”.** Thirteen participants from eight districts were joined the meeting.

Bushra Khaliq, The International Council member WMW moderated the meeting. She welcomed the participants and provided a background of the topic by recalling the tragic incident of Rana Plaza.

While explaining, she told that 7 years ago, on 24 April 2013, one of the worst industrial accident happened in Bangladesh, where 1134 garment workers, mostly women, were killed and 2500 injured in Rana Plaza Building collapse. The textile factories established in this 11-story building were suppliers to a number of popular international brands; including Primark, Bon Marche, Joe Fresh, El Corte Ingles, KiK and Mango.

The tragedy revealed the lust of the transnational corporations, by ignoring the decent working conditions for laborers and using delivery pressure on their suppliers to satisfy the buyer-driven corporate nature of global garment supply chain. In response to this tragedy, survivors and outraged Bangladeshis, global civil society and labor groups, among many others, demanded justice for the killed garment workers. However, a combination of weak laws, poor oversight and connivance between the govt officials and powerful TNCs, helped these corporations to avoid punishment.

Since then, Bushra told, this has been a day of feminist action and solidarity of the World March of Women (WMW) against the exploitative-based businesses of transnational companies. Expressing solidarity with the victims and their families, Bushra told, on April 24th, once again we are here to raise our voices against the corporate crimes of these transnational powers, their violations against women and peoples around the world.

Abdul Khaliq, the debt justice campaigner and country focal person of CADTM-Pakistan, while presenting lead off, explained the historical background of TNCs, their predatory business model and connivance with the ruling elite of developing countries.

He said, Transnational Corporations are among the world's biggest economic institutions. A rough estimate suggests that the 300 largest TNCs own or control at least one-quarter of the entire world's productive assets, worth about US$5 trillion. Plenty of corporations are on par with some of the largest economies in the world: Walmart exceeds Spain and Australia, for example. Of the top 100 revenue generators, 71 are corporations. The cash that Apple has on hand exceeds the GDPs of two-thirds of the world’s countries.

He shared the global economic fall-out and its impacts on the local economies hitting the poor and workers as worst due to the pandemic. He also briefly mentioned the recent debt relief by IMF and G20 to poor and developing countries, calling it too less a measure. Khaliq demanded the cancellation of the developing countries debt for at least two years.

Taking about the function of the TNCs, he told, the State power did not disappear with globalization, but it transformed. It now competes with corporations for influence and political power. States use corporations and vice versa.

Tax evasion, mis invoicing, intra-company trade is common practice of the TNCs. These companies choose locations for personnel, factories, executive suites, or bank accounts based on where regulations are friendly, resources abundant, and connectivity seamless. Clever multinationals often have legal domicile in one country, corporate management in another, financial assets in a third, and administrative staff spread over several more

Sidra Humayoun, a rights activist from Islamabad shared her grave concern about the division of the society during this crisis and the worst effects on the women, workers. She demanded to start campaign to end exploitation and the equal services for all.

Aqeela Naz, the peasant’s leader shared that Nestle milk factory, in Kabirwala has been exploiting the natural resources without respecting the labor laws in Pakistan. During the COVID-19, several workers were laid off. They are now blackmailing the peasants by refusing to purchase their milk. The worried farmers have no option but to sell the milk at lowest price, offered by Nestle.

Describing the plight of the women cotton pickers in her area, she told, they work under harsh weather, against minimal wages, exposing themselves to different pesticides normally sprayed on cotton by the farmers. Several TNCs, including IKEA are the buyers of raw cotton material from Pakistan, but they rarely perform their due corporate social responsibility in this regard. She demanded accountability of all the exploiters throughout the cotton supply chain, from local contractors to manufacturers of final product.

Kainat Malik, a journalist and local activist from Rajanpur, highlighted the miserable work condition of agriculture women workers in rural areas of South Punjab. She said that majority of poor women in district Rajanpur, work in the tobacco processing sector. The contractors sell their product to big tobacco companies. Their workplaces are ding, without proper light and ventilation. The women workers here are directly exposed to the hazardous tobacco odor.

Naghma Iqtidar, a rights activist from Karachi shared that the capitalism has exposed once again, and we are witnessing huge crisis regarding food sovereignty and health services. The govts are still protecting the big businesses through bail out packages but hoodwinking the needs of the poor masses, facing health, food and economic issues during the on-going lock down. She urged the social protection, food and protective items to the daily wagers, workers and people living in the slums. This is a matter of grave concern particularly, for country, where 46% population is already living below poverty line.

Ambreen Fatima demanded from the govt to extend all necessary services to the domestic workers, cotton pickers’ women, home based workers on the priority during the lock down.

Asma Aamir, the young activist told that there are several big brands, big shopping stores and multi-national companies whose offices are now open but their employees especially the working women are not being facilitated by the transportation, which can cause risk to their health.

Dr. Hira Safdar, a young medical officer in a local hospital presented the latest situation of rising cases of Corona patents in hospitals and the issues medical staff is facing in the absence of sufficient necessary equipment. She further, explained the poor performance of the health ministry in the beginning of the COVID-19.

At the end Bushra, while discussing the situation of media, said media is scary and totally under the State control. It is not ready to give space to the opinion of the civil society. Quoting few examples of her interaction with local media in recent past, she said we have to rethink our strategy to reclaim our spaces. She apprehended the worst kind of surveillance of the rights activist work in upcoming days. As our states are the biggest protectors of the crony capitalism and TNCs and not caring and prioritizing the needs of their citizens.

 