



LDC
Watch

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Fighting for justice, peace and human rights of the LDCs

LDC5

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NEWSLETTER

Fighting for peace, justice and human rights

AT A GLANCE

- Thank you note !
- Vaccine inequity
- Working to fight human trafficking in Nepal
- Women's work is never done

Thank you note!

Dear friends:

We, at LDC Watch, would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to each and every one of you who participated in the events organised by LDC Watch during the LDC5 Conference organised in Doha from 04 to 09 March, 2023. Your participation and presence have made these events a great success. Also, we would like to extend our gratitude to our hosts the State of Qatar and the Schura council for their gracious hospitality. We, at LDC Watch, believe that the voices of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) must be heard, and the LDC5 Conference was an opportunity to bring together representatives from various LDCs, civil society organisations, and development partners to discuss the challenges faced by LDCs and find ways to address them. Through the events organised during the Conference, we were able to facilitate important discussions and debates on issues such as poverty, climate change, gender inequality, and access to healthcare and education, among others.

We also had the pleasure of hosting an exhibition booth that showcased the work of LDC Watch, especially the work of LDC Watch National Focal Point Organisations (NFPs) based in the UN-defined 46 LDCs. We were thrilled to see so many of you visit our booth and engage with our team members. We were happy to provide you with information about our organisation, the work we do, and the various projects we are involved in to promote the rights of the LDCs. We hope that the information we provided was useful, and that it will inspire you to take action and support our cause.

We would also like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to H.E Rabab Fatima, UN Under-Secretary-General & High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs & SIDS, UN-OHRLLS; Honourable Nancy Tembo, Foreign Minister of Malawi and Member of Parliament; H.E Amrit Bahadur Rai, Permanent Representative of Nepal to the United Nations, New York and all the speakers, panelists, moderators, and organisers who contributed to the success of the conference. Your expertise, knowledge, and insights were invaluable, and we are grateful for your participation. Your presence and engagement were the highlight of the events that we organised, co-organised and facilitated. Also, we are grateful to Erica Carroll-Ogunka, Eva Marie Vestergaard, Tomas Manuel Gonzalez Alvarez and all the UNOHRLLS team for their untiring role in coordinating with LDC civil society in rendering an effective LDC5. Thanks are also due to those organisations that invited LDC Watch representatives as speakers, panelists and moderators to their own events.

Together, we can build a more inclusive and sustainable world for all, leaving no one behind.

With best regards,

Demba Moussa Dembele, President
Arjun Kumar Karki, Global Coordinator
LDC Watch



Vaccine inequity

Vaccine apartheid – a clear example of the health inequity between rich and poor countries

The Covid pandemic vividly illustrated the vaccine-divide between the rich and the poor and the devastating consequences of medical technology protectionism against the most vulnerable people. The inability of LDCs to have access to vaccine was reflected in extremely low Covid vaccination rates LDCs achieved – as of mid-2021, only 2% of the population had been vaccinated, compared to 41% in developed countries.

The TRIPS Agreement, which came into effect on 1 January 1995 through World Trade Organization negotiations, protects intellectual property rights for WTO members. Protection of technology related to production of vaccines and life-saving drugs has increased the cost and lowered the access to essential medical products in countries with low capability to produce by themselves.



Patent protection prevented production of vaccines for Covid in developing countries

For instance, patent protection restricted sharing the technology of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines manufactured in developed countries, which could have facilitated the production of vaccines in developing world. The low vaccination rate in LDCs during the Covid pandemic highlights the necessity of TRIPS waiver for all developing countries, including LDCs, that would remove patents and certain other intellectual property (IP) protections associated with vaccines, treatments, and tests, among other life-saving drugs.

Against such inhumane protectionism, India and South Africa tabled a proposal for a wide TRIPS waiver for all developing countries to remove patents and certain other intellectual property protections associated with vaccines, treatments, and tests, to allow countries to manufacture them themselves.

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, this was opposed by developed countries, pushed by their pharmaceutical companies. LDC Watch, along with other Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in the Global South, demanded, during the drafting process of the Doha Programme of Action (DPoA), that the TRIPS waiver should continue for all LDCs, and for at least 12 years after LDC graduation. However, the DPoA paid little heed to the CSOs' demand and only reiterated WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) decision that the TRIPS waiver extension for pharmaceutical products would only last until 1 January, 2033 or until graduation, whichever is earlier.

LDCs' TRIPS waiver

Under pressure, the transition period for pharmaceutical products, during which the TRIPS agreement is waived off, has been extended for LDCs until July 2034, or until a country 'graduates' from LDC status, whichever is earlier.

The current TRIPS waiver is insufficient for LDCs for the following reasons:

- Firstly, it is very narrowly applied, as it only applies to vaccines, not to most of diagnostics, treatments and therapies, so is not a comprehensive waiver.
- Secondly, it only lasts until 2034, and then has to be renegotiated.
- Thirdly, countries such as Bangladesh, an LDC on the verge of producing its own medicines, is scheduled to graduate in 2026, will lose the TRIPS waiver in two or three years, putting an end to plan producing medicines.

LDC Watch demands

LDC Watch is therefore asking for the following:

- There is an urgent necessity for a broader TRIPS waiver for developing countries, including LDCs, that removes patents and other IP protections associated with vaccines, treatments and tests, as well as the life-saving drugs.
- The TRIPS waiver should be in perpetuity for LDCs.
- Given the need for a smooth sustainable and irreversible transition, the period in which countries can retain the waiver should be extended to 12 years.
- The provision of equal access to medical technologies and sharing of related knowledge should not be compromised in the WHO's Pandemic Treaty, which is in the drafting process.

Given that the weak language of the DPoA lacks any commitment on the part of the developed countries and development parties to change the rules, civil society members from LDCs, particularly from Africa where vaccination rate has been the lowest, demonstrated with placards during the LDC5 conference. They demanded vaccine equity and fair sharing of technology related to life-saving pharmaceutical products.

Working to fight human trafficking in Nepal

Human trafficking is growing across the world with thousands of men, women and children trafficked every year, and Nepal is one of the countries badly hit. Nepal's Human Rights Commission estimates that In 2018 (the last year for which figures were available) around 35,000 people, including 15,000 women and 5,000 girls (out of a population of just 30.5 million) were trafficked.

The picture of trafficking has changed in Nepal

A few year ago, it was the source country of the trafficking, but recently has become a transit country for trafficking to countries further west, with the added phenomenon of internal trafficking.

During the Conference we spoke to Benu Maya Gurung, Executive Director of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Women and Children Nepal (AATWIN), a national alliance, founded in 1997. AATWIN has been working to combat trafficking in all its forms, and works on the policy, information and implementation levels, as well as capacity building. As trafficking is an organised crime, it networks at the local, national and international levels.

Trafficked for sexual exploitation and for slave labour

Benu Maya Gurung explained that initially the major objective of trafficking was for sexual exploitation, but “nowadays, because of globalization, there is an increasing demand for cheap labour, which is made available due to unemployment and natural disasters. Nepal is a major country where the population is trafficked to fill poorly paid jobs. In the last few years many men, women and even the children are trafficked for work”.

The situation was also exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. Many Nepalese lost their jobs as businesses collapsed so the loss of employment became a factor pushing people into seeking work abroad, and thus becoming victims of trafficking to work in slave-like conditions. With families becoming more impoverished, families are forced to send their children out to work in neighbouring countries and to the big cities in Nepal.

Benu Maya Gurung describes AATWIN's experience

“We found that there are many women who are trafficked internally to work in the informal sector – often in the entertainment industry – where they won't even receive the minimum wages which is fixed by the Nepal government. Because many women feel it is better to work than not, they are being pushed into slavery. These woman are undocumented, so they don't have a safety net, so are vulnerable prey for the trafficking. They will get exploited, because they are undocumented, and won't get the services other workers get”.



While trafficking is primarily of women and girls, who are most vulnerable, the trafficking of men and boys has increased significantly, both internationally and internally. However, this is less well-reported, partly because the men themselves don't like to think of themselves as being trafficked, which they see it as belittling, so prefer to describe themselves as being "exploited" or "cheated". It also happens that agencies working to fight trafficking may refuse to accept that men are trafficked, so won't report it, and consequently there is a lack of shelter homes for boys and men who have been found to be trafficked.

Trafficked for organs

A recent phenomenon – because of problems for families brought on by the pandemic – is the trafficking for organ transplants, especially kidneys.

Benu Maya Gurung further shared, "We know of a village nearby Kathmandu, where more than 100 people have already sold their kidneys to the neighbouring countries. However, as we now have kidney transplant facilities in Nepal, I am very worried about there being a kidney selling business in Nepal. It has been reported that doctors, who perform the kidney transplants, are offering people commission if they can provide kidneys. So now there is an internal network for selling kidneys in Nepal as well as to neighbouring countries, especially India.

Issues like these show how vital the work that AATWIN is carrying out in Tibet.

Women's work is never done

International Women's Day, which took place during the Conference, was a day to acknowledge the huge amount of invisible care work that women carry out daily – running a home, looking after children or elderly or disabled relatives, and in LDC agricultural areas – collecting water or firewood. It even goes as far social reproduction – bringing future citizens into the world.

At a Civil Society Forum meeting during the conference, Marina Durano from UNI Global Union confronted the issue face on, suggesting that economic society needs to undergo "structural transformation" with care work given its rightful due. Either by "monetising" care - paying care activities a decent wage or by a structural transformation of the economy which puts the care economy at its centre. She cited two countries – Venezuela and Mexico – which have built recognition of the value of care work into their national constitutions.

If care is to be "monetised", care workers and others must be paid a decent wage, and unionisation of workers – which seems to have gone out of fashion in the Global North, but not the South – is crucial to do this.

Women make up a large majority of those working in the care industry, and a union which is growing internationally to support them is UNI Global Union. This union federation (meaning other



unions working in the same field affiliate to it) represents over 20 million workers in the private sector and services sector, including care workers and cleaners. In a new field for unionising workers, it has recently been organising in the digitisation and technology sector, such as Google, Facebook, and the online gaming sector. As Marina pointed out, many of these workers work online, so only infrequently meet other people working in the same field, or realise they face the same problems at work – long hours, or high stress levels caused by working to tight deadline. At the moment firms like Facebook and Google are shedding up to 30% of their staff, so UNI Global Union organisers are working to manage the impact.

Unionisation in the care and services sectors has traditionally been low, because these sectors are structured in a segmented way, and it is sub-contracted, making it more difficult to be in contact with those employed in it. “We have to organize those workers who are in informal or unstable contractual situations as much as we need to organize those who are in proper employment”, Marina explained.

In the past many unions round the world had a poor record in appealing to women, particularly in the services sector, so it is welcome to see unionisation growing in sectors where women outnumber men. Currently, in the care sector, 70% of the staff are female with 80% women in the call centres, although on average workforce is 60% female.

The union also has a strong mentoring programme, and leadership training, aimed at women. The union also has a rule that there must be 40% female participation at any official activity.

An interesting aspect, often overlooked is that those working in the retail sector need support as they get a lot of violence and harassment from customers in the workplace, such as supermarkets. “We organise them. We unionise them,” explains Marina.

Looking at UNI Global’s work in a larger context, if one of the union’s *raison d’être* is to build women workers’ capacity, building capacity is in line with one of the criteria for LDC graduation “Strengthening capacity of the workforce”.

And to return to the idea of an economy that gives care professions proper recognition, Marina says: “it’s not just about workers’ rights, but our contribution to democracy”.

Reach Out

For questions, feedback, article ideas, or story contributions, email ldcnewsservice@gmail.com and we’ll be in touch.

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