

Fisher women Protest against World Tourism Day

Hundreds of fisher women under the banner of Theeradesa Mahilavedi, the women's wing of the Kerala Swatantra Matsya Thozhilali Federation (KSMTF) protested against the World Tourism Day celebration on 27th September in front of the secretariat, Trivandrum.

World Tourism Day is to be observed on 27th September each year by different themes selected by the General Assembly of UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization), on recommendation of UNWTO's Executive Council, to promote awareness among the international community of the importance of tourism. This year's tourism day's theme was 'Tourism opens doors for women'. The Theeradesa Mahilavedi has expressed strong dissent due to the implications of this effort, in this context when the tourism industry has already generated a number of negative impacts on women.

The draft Coastal Zone Management Plan prepared by Ministry of Environment and Forests, which excludes tourism projects from coastal zone regulations, is testimony to this. The zone demarcations being proposed will further cut off fisher people's traditional access to the sea and the coasts. As further stretches of beach are bought by hotel and tourism lobbies, privatized coasts will mean no place for drying fish, mending nets, or carrying out all the ancillary activities that provide fisher women a means of survival

The members of the Theeradesa Mahilavedi have pointed out that the World Tourism Organisation and various government and intergovernmental organisations are using this occasion to protect the interests of industry and celebrating it as one sided and biased manner. These celebrations are not corresponding to the interests of marginalized communities. While international agencies such as the UNWTO are actively promoting this year's theme, what the hype obscures is the negative impact of tourism on women, especially marginalized women through pressure on natural and other resources, curtailed access to resources, and vulnerability to sexual and other forms of harassment.

The Theeradesa Mahilavedi has called for the civil society to support the struggle against the World Tourism Day celebrations, its politics in the context of the "Tourism opens doors for women" theme and its negative impacts on women, local communities, environment and culture. The existing Tourism development has already resulted in an alarming increase in Sex Tourism, child labor, drug addiction and child abuse.

The fisher women demanded

- 1) That the Government of India and various state governments to stop acquiring further coastal land for tourism development
- 2) Immediate monitoring of cultural impact of tourism development on traditional communities
- 3) Immediate rehabilitation of communities displaced by tourism development, and further,
- 4) Immediate steps to be taken to clean up already accumulated pollution, waste and ecological damage due to tourism.

The protest was led by Elizabeth Antony, Freeska Kurishappan, Magline Peter, Girly John, Everesta Jose and Mereena.