

## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FREEDOM FROM DEBT COALITION**

## **Water Advocates Reject Water Privatization, Assert Water is Every Person's Right!**

Some 100 people attended the People's Forum workshop on water privatization and struggles in Asia organized by Jubilee South-APMDD, together with PSI, NGO Forum and AMNET – Japan. In the workshop, labor unions and water campaigners from civil society presented their critique on the ADB water privatization agenda and their struggles for water justice.

The speakers were one in saying that the ADB privatization policy has made clean and affordable water inaccessible to the poor when water was made a commodity by the private water companies under the privatization policy. “The private companies now running the water distribution system in the Philippines have already raised the water rates by as much as 550% and 750% higher than the original tariffs,” said Ana Maria R. Nemenzo of the Freedom from Debt Coalition in the Philippines. For the workers, “privatization aims to reduce operational expenses hitting the workers as the size of the workforce is trimmed down for the private sector to maximize profit,” according to Roberta Estimo of the Maynilad Water's Union. It was striking in the workshop that even when privatization has obviously failed in the Philippines, the government re-privatized it again after the water company running it had surrendered the utility to the government. Workers and the water advocates both agree that privatization has failed and it has not delivered its promise of affordable, safe, and efficient delivery of water. They all asserted that water is an essential service that every person has the right to have access to, and that the delivery of such must remain in public hands.

It was noted in the workshop that opposing privatization of water does not mean that people are already content with the way the state runs the water distribution system. It was emphasized that reforms have to be made in the delivery of water to realize the goal of better and affordable service in the water sector. But the people reject ADB's privatization solution to water problems. Instead, water advocates proposed alternatives. An example of this is the public-public partnership, but Hamong Santono of Kruha, Indonesian Coalition for Water Rights, cautioned the audience that “we have to be careful about public-public partnership as this can also be used by the private sector to increase its presence and control over delivery of water.” The Transnational Institute – Corporate Europe Observatory launched the Japanese version of “Reclaiming Public Water” which illustrates the failures of privatization and presents some alternatives, some are already being applied in the different countries across the world.

The workshop was co-organized by Jubilee South/Asia-Pacific Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD), Public Services International (PSI), NGO Forum on the ADB, Freedom from Debt Coalition (FDC), Transnational Institute (TNI), Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), AM Net, and Focus on the Global South.