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**Report of the General Secretary Thanassis Pafilis to the WPC Secretariat,  
Vientiane/Lao PDR, 25-26 November 2019**

Distinguished comrades and friends of the Lao Committee for Peace and Solidarity!  
Dear comrades of the Secretariat and the Asia & Pacific members of WPC!

It is with immense pleasure to be these days here in the capital of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, in the beautiful city of Vientiane and in such excellent conditions and hospitality by the Lao Committee for Peace and Solidarity (LCPS). We thank the LCPS and salute the peace loving people of Laos and its leadership, the Lao People's Revolutionary Party.

Dear comrades

We took the decision to hold this joint meetings of Asia & Pacific and of the Secretariat, based on the good practice we have but also in order to allow us all from the Secretariat to participate in the regional meeting and the members from the region to enrich with their presence the Secretariat meeting itself. The region has its special importance, taking into account that almost half of the world's population lives here, with dozens of countries and cultures and a rich history of national liberation struggles, social struggles and revolutions with important achievements and victories.

In particular we would like to underline the achievements and progress of the People of Laos, a country with a rich history and culture in centuries and a rare natural beauty. We acknowledge the brave stand of the Lao people who have suffered during the US war against Vietnam between 1964 and 1973 heavy losses and destruction. The U.S. dropped three million tons of bombs on Laos, more than the bombs the U.S. dropped on Europe and Asia during all of World War II, making Laos the most heavily bombed country in history relative to the size of its population, which was then 3 Millions. It is like one ton per citizen of Laos. All this years the country is facing the consequences of Unexploded Ordinances (UOX) with farmers and children being injured and handicapped from the "Baby Bombs" of the US. We express our solidarity with the people of Laos and add our voice to the demand for just compensation and for alleviation of the victims by the ones who committed these crimes.

Dear comrades

The WPC has completed this year 70 years of struggle and service to the Poor and

Oppressed. Under the slogan “**World Peace Council, 70 years of service for the struggle and in solidarity of the peoples, against imperialist exploitation and wars**”, we have commemorated our anniversary in various moments and places this year, such as in Caracas in April 2019, in Guantanamo in May 2019, in Basel in September 2019 and so do we underline at the end of this year this important anniversary here in Vientiane.

We would like furthermore to highlight and commemorate from this meeting in Vientiane the 100 years from the birth of our beloved and historical leader Romesh Chandra, who served and guided the WPC for 40 years and contributed decisively to the maintaining of its character throughout the time. Already a special event was held in Hanoi last September by VPC and AIPSO and our comrades from India will honor Romesh Chandra also in their forthcoming National Conference in Raipur/India in January 2020.

Dear comrades

The situation in the world regarding the peace and security and the peoples' rights and demands is complicated and characterized by the growing aggressiveness of imperialism in many forms and expressions. The imperialist aggressions and threats have increased, while the US, NATO and the EU governments are increasing their military budgets in order to realize their plans in all corners of the world.

The slight recovery of the world economy in comparison to the previous 10 years is actually leading again to a new circle of capitalist economic crisis, as the indications in many industrialized capitalist countries show. The root causes of the economic crisis are the same and the victims of it again the workers, peasants youth and unemployed masses. Likewise the same are also the ones who benefit from the crisis e.g. the big capital, Multinationals and Monopolies who are increasing even in these times their profits.

At the same time we note with concern the extremely negative developments around the withdrawal of the USA from the INF agreement, which will open the ways for already existing plans of deployment of new nuclear arsenals by the US in the Balkans and Middle East, which will cause a new arms race internationally. Such developments are opposed strongly by the WPC, while we insist and strive for the global abolition of nuclear weapons and tests in the world. We can already observe the increase of the military budgets and a new arms race, weapons export with lucrative profits for the war industry worldwide.

Without underestimating other cases allow me to refer to some only areas and countries, where we have escalating negative developments.

The general situation in the Middle East continues being explosive. The situation in Syria, despite the significant victories of the Syrian people and army, remains under tension, with the recent military invasion of Turkey in the Northeastern part of the country and their plans to actually remain and de facto annex sovereign Syrian territory. The pretext of “security” is cynical and cannot hide the aims of Turkey for change of the demographic composition (against the Kurdish population) in the northern part of Syria along with the geo-strategical expansion of Turkey. The partial withdrawal of US-troops from this area opened the way for Turkey's incursion and is accompanied openly by statements of US President D. Trump, that the USA will maintain the control of the Syrian oil in the same area. All the above constitute once more the ongoing violation of the sovereignty of Syria and of every sense of International Law. We observe with deep concern the agreements between involved parties (USA, Turkey, Russia etc.) which actually neglect the right of the Syrian people to exercise fully their sovereign rights over the land. As WPC we demand the withdrawal of the foreign military occupation forces in Syria and support the right of the Syrian people to decide alone upon their destiny and future.

We saluted the recent popular mass mobilizations in Lebanon for social, economical and political demands and reiterate our solidarity with the Lebanese people for the end of its territories by Israel (Shebaa Farms). Likewise we express our solidarity with the people of

Yemen against the ongoing aggression by the Saudi led coalition which has the full support of the US and its allies.

A key issue continues being the struggle of the Palestinian people, which is struggling for the end of the Israeli occupation. We denounce the slaughter of Palestinian by the Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, as well as expansion of the settlements and land robbing, which continue along with the Judaization of Jerusalem and the deprivation of political rights for Non-Jewish citizens in Israel. As WPC we reiterate our full support to the struggle of the Palestinian people to end the occupation and for their right to establish an independent and viable State within the borders of pre 4<sup>th</sup> June 1967 with East Jerusalem as its capital. We call upon and struggle for the recognition of such State by governments and the UN and reject the imperialist maneuvers and hypocrisy towards Palestine by equating victims and aggressors. We demand the release of all Palestinian political prisoners from Israeli jails and the right for the return of the Palestinians to their lands, according to the UN Resolution 194.

Dear Comrades

The situation in Latin America is of great concern.

The most recent Coup d' Etat in Bolivia (10<sup>th</sup> November) against the legitimately re-elected President Evo Morales on 20<sup>th</sup> October, constitutes an open intervention of the US, its loyal mechanism of the Organisation of American States (OAS), well coordinated with the local oligarchy. We condemn the Coup and demand the respect to the expressed will of the Bolivian people. The subversive and destabilizing actions and the interference in the army and police are a repetition of what the imperialists and their allies tried in the case of Venezuela. They remind us of the darkest days in the recent history of Latin America (dictatorships, military interventions etc.) and are directly linked with the imperialist plans against Cuba, Nicaragua and other countries. The WPC expresses its deep concern with the negative developments in the region where the US administration and the EU (and its governments) are playing a major role in the support of reactionary forces and the "violent regime change".

In Venezuela, the forces of the local oligarchy tried to overthrow the legitimately elected President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in close cooperation with the USA, the European Union and reactionary governments of the "Lima Group" in order to take over the rich mineral resources of Venezuela. The ideological and political attack on Venezuela and Cuba is accompanied by heavy sanctions against the peoples, aiming in the asphyxiation of the peoples. Nicaragua is being targeted also with the same methods as in Bolivia and Venezuela. As WPC we expressed our strong opposition to the above plans with statements, protests and demonstrations of our member Organisations in dozens of countries. It is self-understanding to underline our sincere and deep solidarity with the other peoples in Latin America and their struggles, and against the new threats and dangers and in the framework of the new regimes in Brazil, Colombia etc.

We express our solidarity with the massive popular protests in Chile and condemn the repression and authoritarian policies of the police and state apparatus.

The WPC expressed its solidarity with the Cuban Revolution and the struggles of the peoples of Latin America in various recent occasions. We participated, amongst others, in the International Solidarity Mission with the people of Venezuela (April 2019), in the events commemorating the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution (July 2019) but also in the International Anti-imperialist Gathering held in November in Cuba (organized by ICAP and MOVPAZ). The WPC participated in the 18<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Baku (October 2019) where we had the chance to speak and express our principle positions.

Dear comrades

Allow us to refer also to the developments of the region of Asia&Pacific, which held yesterday its meeting here in Vientiane in the framework of the WPC. The US-administration is not hiding its priorities and aims to contain the emerging role of China both economically and politically. The so-called trade war is an expression of the fierce competition between US-EU-Russia, China and others on the distribution of markets and spheres of influence. The US is shifting major contingent of their Navy and Army to the region, where they maintain tens of thousands of troops and more than 200 Military Bases. Through their allies (Japan, South Korea, Australia etc.) they are building "Missile Defense Shields" and deploy rapid intervention forces in many countries. The "picture" is being completed by the "Bilateral Military Agreements" which the US has signed with almost all countries of the region, supposedly on mutual basis, having China as a main target.

The WPC EC expresses its serious concern about the growing religious strife and fundamentalism in South Asia which are used to divide the peoples' struggles. We call upon the social organizations to be alerted about this explosive situation and to mobilize against such divisive agenda and the growing nationalist tendencies as it was observed recently with the War rhetoric between India and Pakistan.

We observe with deep concern the increasing alignment of the government of India with the imperialist plans in the region and in particular its joint military naval exercises with the US-Japan-Australia in the Pacific Ocean with the clear plan to contain China. Likewise we are troubled with the increase of the military budget of India by 3.1% bringing the country 4<sup>th</sup> biggest military spender after USA, China and Saudi Arabia.

On the developments on the Korean Peninsula we observe with caution the situation and support the Inter-Korean talks with the perspective of the independent and peaceful reunification of the peninsula, along with our demands for the end of the military exercises of USA-Japan and South Korea and the withdrawal of the US troops and their THAAD umbrella from the Korean soil. In this light we support the efforts for the signing of a peace accord between the DPR Korea and the USA in substitution to the armistice agreement of 1953 and the complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. We express our solidarity with the Korean National Peace Committee (KNPC) for their noble struggle of the reunification of their fatherland.

The WPC is following with concern the developments in the South China Sea, particularly about the territorial and maritime disputes between several neighboring countries. We support the peaceful settlement of differences bilaterally and multilaterally between all involved parties. We call upon all sides to refrain from any unilateral actions which may further complicate the situation; we reaffirm our principled position for the respect and implementation of International law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which guarantees the sovereign rights of all countries. We are strongly against the militarization of the area as well as the military presence and actions of non-regional powers, notably the US, which has clearly its own motives and interests. We demand their withdrawal from the region and call upon all sides to de-escalate militarily the situation.

On the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima&Nagasaki in 1945, we reiterate our firm position for the complete abolition of all Nuclear weapons and the ban of all Nuclear weapons' tests. At the same time we underline the fact that the USA is the only country which has used such weapons in history. Moreover it does not refrain from a first nuclear strike option, on the contrary it has introduced it also to NATO, which has adopted it in its Warsaw summit in 2016.

The WPC reiterates its firm position against NATO, as an instrument of the imperialist domination and the armed wing of the US and EU imperialists. The NATO expansion to the east, its encirclement of Russia along its borders, with the deployment of troops from the Baltic

Sea to Bulgaria and the installation of the Missile Defense Shield” in Poland and Romania, is aggressively and deliberately escalating the tension. This goes hand in hand with the sanctions of the US and EU against Russia. NATO is developing and increasing its arsenal aiming at nuclear first strike capacity against its opponents. It has decided to increase its military expenditure of all members to the 2% of the annual GDP of each. We struggle for and demand the dissolution of NATO on global scale, while supporting the struggle of the peoples in each member state to disengage from it. The European Union, alone and/or with NATO, is acting against its peoples. Its Common Security and Defense policy and the creation of the EU army, along with the ‘Permanent Structural Cooperation (PESCO) constitute dangerous tools for foreign intervention and imperialist aggression in many parts of the world.

We are proud for having organized this year, during the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of NATO in Washington D.C., for the first time in history a WPC event, in form of an Anti-NATO conference on US soil in March 2019, hosted by the US Peace Council. We shall continue with our campaign “*Yes to Peace-No to NATO*”.

Dear comrades

The WPC has increased its actions and initiatives the last years; we have reached new venues for our constitutional meetings on regional and global level, which shows the commitment and readiness of our member organisations to serve as host for WPC meetings. The meetings here in Laos but also the regional European meeting in Switzerland held in September is such evidence, whereas the WPC organized in both cases after 35 years again its meetings. The WPC members and the WPC as a whole, have strong presence in actions, events and protests on the burning issues and the plan of action defined by the Executive Committee and the Secretariat.

From the last Secretariat meeting held end of March in Belgrade, where we co-organized with the “Belgrade Forum for the World of Equals” the international conference denouncing the aggression and crimes of NATO 20 years ago, the WPC is consolidating its presence and enlarging its ranks. We note with satisfaction the requests for affiliation with the WPC in several cases, which shall be consulted in the region and approved by the coming Executive Committee.

We have in front of us a period, where will head towards the next Assembly of the WPC, an issue we shall discuss in our Secretariat meeting these days. The WPC has all the conditions and capacity to reach the next Assembly stronger in members, firm in its principles and militant in its anti-imperialist approach, honoring our 70 years long, glorious history.

These successful Vientiane meetings of the WPC are an encouraging message to the WPC membership and to the global peace movement.

We thank once more the Lao Committee for Peace and Solidarity for their warm reception and hospitality and congratulate all leaders, members and staff for their hard work.