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THE STALEMATE IN IRAQ AND THE GLOBAL PEACE MOVEMENT

By Walden Bello*

Before the US-UK invasion of Iraq, I was often invited to television talk shows to provide an “unconventional” counterpoint to Philippine government officials who confidently echoed the Washington’s scenario of a quick war. But it was probably only at the Iraqi-Syrian border on March 17 that I became solidly convinced that the US had a protracted conflict on its hands. At the otherwise nondescript “VIP Lounge,” our Asian Peace Mission leaving Iraq encountered about 20 young men going in the opposite direction. They were Moroccans, Algerians, Lebanese, Syrians, Egyptians, Palestinians. In their late twenties, thirties, or forties, they were obviously not green, with some said to be veterans of Israeli jails. They were in high spirits, obviously relishing what they regarded as a rare opportunity to face the hated Americans in battle. Were they Arab volunteers, I asked. “Islamic fighters,” I was corrected.

US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld recently attacked Syria for allegedly sending weapons, including night vision goggles, to Iraq. But what he was probably most upset about but could not mention on pain of giving more evidence that things were not going according to plan was the transit through Syria of these Muslim fighters, whom Baghdad now claims number in the thousands.

VOLUNTEERS AND MILITIA

These militants are joining the estimated 750,000 trained and well-armed militia that the Iraqis say they have. Even if only a third of these were actually

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available, the US force that is poised to enter Baghdad would have its hands full. But what the US faces is probably an even greater number of effective combatants since many ordinary men, women, and children are likely to join the fray.

These were supposed to be the people who would rise up against Saddam in Rumsfeld's script. Had US intelligence agents talked to Maha, the Iraqi refugee who was on the same plane with me from Damascus, they would have had very serious reservations about this scenario. She told me that her brother and sister also had a chance to flee before the fighting broke out, but "they decided to stay and fight together with their families." Had they had the freewheeling discussion we had on March 16 with the students at Baghdad University, they would have torn up the Rumsfeld script, for one thing was unquestionable: beneath the cheerful banter, these young men and women were ready to die for their country and their faith.

CONFUSION IN WASHINGTON

While Baghdad and its population radiate resolve, two weeks into the war Washington is in confusion. Rumsfeld says nothing went wrong, everything went according to plan, while one of his top officers, Lt. Gen. William Wallace says that "the enemy we're fighting is different from the one we war-gamed against." US Theater Commander Tommy Franks says "there is a continuity of operations in the plan," Rumsfeld declares "we have no plans for pauses or ceasefires or anything else," while Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff speaks about "an operational pause in a macro sense."

What seems to be clear to everybody outside the Bush bubble is that almost nothing in this war has evolved as planned: not the conventional battles that would decimate the Iraqi regular army, not the Muslim Shiite uprisings that would smash the Ba'ath Party political administration and set the stage for coalition troops to be welcomed as liberators, not the bombing campaign that would shock and awe the rest of the population into submission.

The truth is that even as Central Command propaganda paints the image of rapid advance, the American campaign has ground to a virtual halt before Baghdad. The British are stuck in Basra. All the way up and down the 450 kilometers between the Kuwait border and their leading elements before Baghdad, coalition troops are being harried by Iraqi irregulars. Inability to distinguish between combatants and civilians is frustrating US troops, leading them to commit one atrocity after another. "Operational macro-pauses" will not solve the American dilemma: having failed to either provoke civil uprisings or draw out the Iraqi regular army to the set piece battles where they could be defeated in detail, the US has no choice but to assault Baghdad without being sure of the outcome.

THE URBAN NIGHTMARE

Recent American experience in urban warfare has not been pleasant. The casualty rate involved in retaking the 22 or so cities that staged uprisings during the Tet offensive in Vietnam was prohibitively high, and when the whole bloody business was finally over, Washington had won the battle but had lost the war, being forced by the precipitous drop in the US public's support for the war to go to the negotiating table.

Mogadishu, October 3, 1993, is a name and date that still rankles in the US Army. Its inflicting over 1000 casualties on the swarming Somalis did not mitigate the fact that a heavily armed Ranger unit was badly mauled, losing 18 dead and 84 wounded, leading to a humiliating US exit as the US public lost appetite for a "peacekeeping mission."

But if the Pentagon is unprepared for what lies ahead, it is not for lack of warning. At a hearing at the US House of Representatives reported by the Financial Times last November, Ret. Gen. Joseph Hoar, former commander in chief of Central Command, said, "In urban warfare, you could run through battalions a day at a time...All our advantages of command and control, technology, mobility-all those things are, in part, given up and you are working with corporals and sergeants and young men fighting street to street." One might add that as technological advantage is nullified, morale begins to spell the difference, and high morale is what urban partisans fighting for kith, kin, and country have an oversupply of.

Nor were the Iraqis shy about giving warnings: As Mohammed Medhi Saleh, a senior member of Saddam Hussein's cabinet told the Washington Post last November, "Take the desert. What's in the desert? If they want to change the political system in Iraq, they have to come to Baghdad. We will be waiting for them here."

"Nightmare" is the word many commentators use to describe any attempt to take a densely metropolis of 4.5 million like Baghdad, where, as in most other third world cities, residential, commercial, military, and government establishments coexist in close proximity; where civilians and partisans will be indistinguishable since one will be fighting a hostile population in arms; where no street can be considered fully secured; where partisans will be on one's front, right, left, rear, and under. In short, as Mark Bowden, author of *Black Hawk Down*, puts it, a "360 degree battlefield".

Then there is a question of numbers. During the guerrilla conflicts in Southeast Asia in the sixties, anti-insurgency experts used to say that to neutralize one guerrilla, you needed six or seven soldiers. Such a ratio translated into a Baghdad setting would underline one thing: that the maximum 50,000 to 65,000 frontline combat troops that the US can deploy for the taking of Baghdad would be grossly inadequate.

Finally, there is the climate, the element that felled both Napoleon and Hitler in their invasion of Russia. Spring is ending, and Baghdad will soon be visited by the horrific Iraqi summer, when temperatures can go as high as 60 degrees centigrade. It is not unlikely that the number of coalition troops felled by heat stroke might rival, if not outstrip, the number of combat casualties.

MILITARY STALEMATE AND THE GLOBAL PEACE MOVEMENT

More and more likely as a scenario in the next few weeks is one comprised of the following elements:

- American indecision, owing to internecine command battles, delays a full-scale assault on Baghdad.
- More and more volunteers from throughout the Arab and Muslim world make their way to the desert Stalingrad, transforming the battle into an apocalyptic struggle between the Arab and Muslim peoples and the "Great Satan."
- Washington launches an assault that quickly becomes a debilitating stalemate.

Outright military defeat for the US is not a likely outcome, though some very credible experts like Scott Ritter, the controversial former UN arms inspector, says that the US military might be forced to stage a desert version of Napoleon's retreat from Moscow.

THE CHALLENGE TO THE GLOBAL PEACE MOVEMENT

In the context of a military stalemate within a widening war, the role of international protest and diplomacy becomes all the more critical. Washington might have been able to turn a deaf ear to other states in the global community when it was confident of its strength. It may no longer be so brash when it is confronted with a no-win military situation. For forces opposing the war, now is the time to press on with the demand for unilateral withdrawal of the US and UK from Iraq. At a time when the situation is far from being resolved on the battlefield, it would be betraying the Iraqi people to shift the struggle to the politics of reconstruction-to the false debate of whether it should be the UN or the US that should manage post-war Iraq. This debate would only have the effect of legitimizing the ongoing invasion. Support for the Iraqi people's defense of their homeland, not support for UN-led reconstruction, should remain the overriding stance of the international community.

Indeed, this should be the case even if Baghdad falls, for the fall of Baghdad will not mean an end to the war. In this context, international diplomacy must support such initiatives as the Arab League's effort to get a Security Council resolution demanding an end to the invasion and, failing that, to bring the matter to the General Assembly.

For the impressive international civil society movement against the war, this is a time for even bigger demonstrations demanding withdrawal of the US and

UK. It is also time to move from spontaneous, country-by-country action to greater global coordination. The international legal machinery must be set in motion to try Bush, Blair, Rumsfeld and other key decision-makers for violations of international law and war crimes. Where Washington and London block UN and other official judicial processes, international people's tribunals involving leading anti-war personalities would be a good substitute.

Aside from efforts to strip the stalled war effort of its last ounce of legitimacy, the movement should launch punitive economic campaigns, such as coordinated international boycotts of US and British corporations such as Macdonald's, Coca Cola, Exxon, and Shell. With the sources of profits of American-owned corporations having become globalized, such campaigns could erode support for the war from a key constituency of the Bush administration.

THE AMERICAN PROBLEM

Winning the American people away from support for the war is one of the greatest challenges of all. Bush is the ultimate unilateralist. So long as he is confident of domestic support for his war, his response to battlefield reversals, as Richard Holbrooke, the Clinton administration diplomat, has noted, will be to "escalate."

There are three key prongs to a successful strategy to win over public opinion, and each will have to be mounted with more care and planning than has gone to the US military's strategy in Iraq:

- A massive effort to win over and consolidate the key pillars of a popular anti-war movement: labor, women, minorities, and students.
- A campaign to pressure the Democrats to cease being a loyal opposition and to exploit existing differences among Republicans. Principles carry little weight with American politicians, so this campaign might need to establish a forceful link between the deteriorating domestic and global economy with the pursuit of the war and make this an issue in the 2004 elections.
- A drive to divorce Wall Street and Main Street from the Bush Camp that would also pound on the connection between the war, the deficit, a weak dollar, rising oil prices, and global recession.

If Bush can unswervingly push a unilateralist line, it is because he is confident that since September 11, he and his clique have reshaped the popular consensus that serves as the underpinning of an imperial democracy such as the United States. Dismantling that consensus can only be successful by appealing to interests, though appeal to principles must continue to be made. Breaking the current American consensus that is based on the idea that imperial expansion is the ultimate solution to security is a precondition for ending this war and preventing future wars. This is a tall order, but it is one that the US and global anti-war

movements have no choice but to tackle head-on.

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FOCUS DECLINES TO REQUEST DFID GRANT RENEWAL IN PROTEST AT BRITISH ROLE IN

Focus on the Global South has decided not to apply for a renewal of its grant from the British Government's Department for International Development (DFID). The reason, according to Walden Bello, executive director of Focus, was "to signal our strong protest at the British government's leading role in the invasion of a sovereign country."

"While our relations with DFID staff members have been good, with no attempt on their part to influence our policies even when they were critical of the British government," said Bello, "clearly the context has changed." The British government, he stated, "has become an accomplice of a gross violation of international law that is condemned by the world community." He continued: "DFID is an agency of a pro-war government. However liberal some of its policies may be, it is a part of a government that must be held accountable for its pro-war posture. Focus cannot be party to the Blair government's hypocritical stance that it supports development while its troops are plunging Iraq into death, destruction, and a reversal of development at the behest of Washington."

Bello also expressed strong disappointment that Clare Short, the UK Secretary for International Development, failed to carry through with her threat to resign from the Blair government if Britain went to war without UN Security Council sanction. "At least Robin Cook followed through with his threat and resigned rather than being party to an aggressive war," said Bello, referring to the former leader of the House of Commons. "On the other hand, after denouncing Mr. Blair as 'extraordinarily reckless' and threatening repeatedly to resign, Clare Short decided to eat her words and put her career ahead of principle," he concluded. "That is regrettable."

“UNITING FOR PEACE”: UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY PROVIDES CRUCIAL OPPORTUNITY FOR GLOBAL PEACE MOVEMENT

By Jeremy Brecher*

The United Nations General Assembly is hovering on the edge of calling an emergency session to challenge the US attack on Iraq. But US opposition has been fierce. The world's “other superpower” — global public opinion as expressed in the global peace movement — can tip the balance if it concentrates on demanding a UN General Assembly meeting to halt the war on Iraq now.

BACKGROUND

When Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956, Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt and began advancing on the Suez Canal. US President Dwight D. Eisenhower demanded that the invasion stop. Resolutions in the UN Security Council called for a cease-fire - but Britain and France vetoed them. Then the United States appealed to the General Assembly and proposed a resolution calling for a cease-fire and a withdrawal of forces. The General Assembly held an emergency session and passed the resolution. Britain and France withdrew from Egypt within a week.

The appeal to the General Assembly was made under a procedure called “Uniting for Peace” (UFP). This procedure was adopted by the Security Council so that the UN can act even if the Security Council is stalemated by vetoes. Resolution 377 provides that, if there is a “threat to peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression” and the permanent members of the Security Council do not agree on action, the General Assembly can meet immediately and recommend collective measures to U.N. members to “maintain or restore international peace and security.” The “Uniting for Peace” mechanism has been used ten times, most frequently on the initiative of the United States.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

At a meeting March 24, 2003, Arab foreign ministers condemned the invasion of Iraq and called on the US and Britain to immediately withdraw their forces without condition. The League's UN ambassador said, “We will ask that the invasion stop, that the invading forces will be withdrawn, and that Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence will be preserved.” It instructed its UN delegates to go first to the Security Council and then, if unsuccessful, to the General Assembly.

The League requested and received a debate in the Security Council. But the decision was made not to submit a resolution against the war since a veto by the US and Britain was nearly certain and the failure to pass such a resolution might be used to defend the war's legitimacy.

After considerable hesitation, a coalition of Arab, other Islamic, and developing countries decided to ask for a special session on Iraq at the UN General Assembly. The Organization of the Islamic Conference Group (OIC) declared on Monday, March 31, that it is ready to take the Iraq war to the General Assembly. The OIC, which includes 57 UN member countries, indicated it would initiate such a meeting before April 9. The plan is for a General Assembly special session to be formally requested by Malaysian Ambassador Rastam Mohd Isa, who heads the 115-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) of developing countries at the United Nations. The Malaysian Ambassador “plans to request the special session, in a letter to . . . the assembly's acting president.”

US OPPOSITION

Meanwhile, the US has been “aggressively lobbying governments around the world for the past two weeks to help head off an emergency assembly session on Iraq.” “We don't think a General Assembly meeting is necessary,” a U.S. official said. “This type of session is only going to divide U.N. members.”

Greenpeace has released the text of a communication from the United States to UN representatives around the world leaked by an “incensed” UN delegate. It stated, “Given the highly charged atmosphere, the United States would regard a General Assembly session on Iraq as unhelpful and as directed against the United States. Please know that this question as well as your position on it is important to the US.” It warned/threatened that “the staging of such a divisive session could do additional harm to the UN.”

HANGING IN THE BALANCE

While the overwhelming majority of the world's people and nations oppose the Bush Administration's attack on Iraq, fear of US retribution has repeatedly forced UN members to draw back from actually implementing a “Uniting for Peace” appeal to the General Assembly. According to UPI, “An informal tally shows that there are not enough nations aligned with the Arab states to bring the topic before the body.”

Currently various blocs in the UN are discussing wording on which they might agree.

An OIC statement called for an immediate cease-fire, withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq, and respect for the sovereignty and political independence of Iraq and its neighbors. However, the OIC is considering proposing a milder resolution in the General Assembly, expressing regret for the use of force against Iraq, in an effort to get support from more nations, notably European nations. This process may drag on for an undetermined time.

WHY UFP MATTERS

A General Assembly resolution will not in itself stop the war. General Assembly actions may not be legally

binding. Besides, the Bush Administration has already shown it is willing to defy the UN and international law. Nonetheless, such a resolution would be a major blow to the Bush Administration - as its campaign to prevent a General Assembly session indicates.

First, a UfP resolution will intensify the fear of global isolation among the US public and elite. Such fears will play a significant role in turning them not only against the Iraq war but more generally against the Bush Administration policy of preventive war and global domination.

Second, a UfP resolution will provide a heightened legitimacy to all the actions of the global peace movement. All its actions in every country will become not merely the expression of an opinion but efforts to implement the decision of the world's highest authority.

Third, a UfP resolution will lay the basis for future UN action, both regarding Iraq and more broadly, that can circumvent the US veto. It can thus provide the starting point for reconstituting the UN as the voice of the world.

WHY A UFP CAMPAIGN MATTERS

A worldwide campaign for UfP provides the global peace movement - the world's "other superpower" - a unique opportunity.

- It provides a great focus for struggle in the streets and in the political arena.
- It will allow the movement to show its global clout.

In every country where the majority of the people oppose the war (probably every country in the world except the US and Israel), the peace movement can demand that the government reject US dictation and support UfP.

On the streets, UfP can become a central demand of the next rounds of global anti-war demonstrations. While it has been endorsed by many campaigning organizations, such as CND in Britain and Greenpeace, it has yet to appear extensively on the programs and picket signs of the big peace demonstrations around the world. The way to go: A recent demonstration in Santiago, Chile urged Chile's President to back a call for the United Nations General Assembly to hold a special session to "adopt moral sanctions against Bush."

In the political process, parliaments can demand that their governments support UfP. The Russian Duma, for example, recently passed a resolution calling for General Assembly intervention in Iraq; so did the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs of Thailand. Political parties provide another arena: the Czech Republic's governing Social Democratic party, whose government has waffled on the war, just voted nearly unanimously to condemn it. (The motion was sponsored by Czech UN Ambassador Jan Kavan, who

happens also to be current President of the UN General Assembly.)

In the US, the peace movement can expose and attack Bush Administration's sabotage of the UN and its illegitimate, deeply resented, and counter-productive efforts to interfere in the political decisions of other countries all over the world.

This is also an opportunity for religious, labor, and other groups in civil society to make their voices heard. For example, a group of Italian Catholic associations petitioned the Italian government demanding that "the UN General Assembly be called to block, based on resolution 337 [Uniting for Peace], any action which does not comply with the UN Charter so as to bring peace." They appealed for "a ceasefire which will put an end to the useless massacre in Iraq." And a group of international women's organizations called for an emergency General Assembly meeting, noting that "the resolve of many UN member states to stand firm against the US, reinforced by the call to enact Uniting for Peace, offer hope for a revitalized international system."

A Greenpeace web petition at www.greenpeace.org calling for a General Assembly session has received 60,000 signatures worldwide. There is also a European-initiated petition at www.ufp.ht.st

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POSTWAR IRAQ: A SHOWCASE FOR PRIVATIZATION?

By Philip Mattera*

Earlier this week, US military officials came up with a solution to the chaos surrounding the distribution of water to civilians in the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr: They are providing water free to locals with tanker trucks, who are being allowed to sell the precious liquid for a “reasonable” fee. “This provides them with an incentive to hustle and to work,” an Army commander told a reporter for the New York Daily News.

This transfer of a public good to private hands may be an initial small step in what could be widespread privatization in Iraq after the war is over. A number of conservative think tank denizens and other analysts have been arguing for months that the post-Saddam Hussein economy should be restructured according to the principles of Milton Friedman.

Just last week, Robert McFarlane, National Security Adviser during the Reagan Administration, and Michael Bleyzer, chief executive of an equity fund management company, published an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal headlined “Taking Iraq Private.” The two men argued that “the U.S. and its allies would be well advised to put together a team of private sector business leaders as a ‘steering committee’ to supervise and monitor” economic restructuring.

An explicit call for privatization, rather than simply private investment, was issued last fall at a conference convened by the right-wing Heritage Foundation. In a paper presented at that conference (and revised last month), Ariel Cohen and Gerald O’Driscoll wrote: “To rehabilitate and modernize its economy, a post-Saddam government will need to move simultaneously on a number of economic policy fronts, utilizing the experience of privatization campaigns and structural reform in other countries.” The authors go on to assert what they call Lesson No. 1: “Privatization Works Everywhere.”

Back in September, the U.S. State Department’s Washington File website gave a full account of the discussion at the Heritage meeting, quoting Cohen as saying that at the top of his list of recommendations was “a modern legal environment that recognizes property rights, which are now non-existent in Iraq, and is conducive to privatization.”

As with other Iraq matters, the U.S. calls for privatization have been echoed in Britain. Last month, the free market-loving Adam Smith Institute issued a paper titled “Toward an Economic and Governance Agenda for a New Iraq.” One section of the document starts out with the declaration: “Privatisation is a sine qua non for successful reform in Iraq.” The authors go on to say, “In Iraq there is much to privatise, as a

considerable portion of the economy is state-owned.” Among the sectors that should be up for grabs, they suggest, are mining, chemicals and construction.

PLAYING DOWN THE BUSINESS BOON

Since the war began, the Bush Administration has avoided talking about the business boon being created in Iraq for U.S. and other foreign corporations. Yet it has taken steps such as awarding a contract to operate the port in Umm Qasr to a private company, Stevedoring Services of America. Another contract, for technical assistance to the reconstruction effort, has been given to the International Resources Group, which will share the work with U.K. subcontractor Crown Agents, which is itself the product of the privatization of a British development assistance agency.

The U.S. Agency for International Development, which is coordinating the reconstruction plans, gave about half a dozen large U.S.-based engineering companies an exclusive right to bid on the main contract for infrastructure work. According to various press reports, the leading contenders for that contract are Bechtel Corp. and Parsons Corp. The latter is said to have taken on Halliburton Co.’s Kellogg Brown & Root unit as a subcontractor after Halliburton was eliminated as a primary bidder, apparently because of controversy surrounding the company’s ties to Vice President Cheney.

What’s significant about Bechtel and Parsons is that both companies, in addition to their main construction units, have operations engaged in privatization activities in the United States and elsewhere. Bechtel is a leading player in water system privatization, ranking just behind the big three — Suez, Vivendi Universal and RWE/Thames Water — in that controversial business. A subsidiary of Bechtel was forced to abandon its operations in Cochabamba, Bolivia, in the wake of a popular uprising over massive water rate hikes. Bechtel is now suing Bolivia for \$25 million in compensation through a secret World Bank tribunal.

Parsons performs privatization feasibility studies and sometimes takes on the projects itself. The most notorious instance of the latter is the company’s role in privatizing the auto inspection system in New Jersey. That project, worth more than \$500 million, has been marked by charges of inefficiency and excessive costs. Parsons was the sole bidder on the contract, which was awarded in the late 1990s by the administration of Gov. Christie Whitman, who is now serving as head of the US Environmental Protection Agency.

It’s clear that there are a lot of business opportunities to be had in Iraq. The Bush Administration is reported to have convened around ten task forces to plan the transformation of everything from agriculture to banking. U.S. companies are expected to receive contracts to restructure and operate facilities such as airports, schools and hospitals.

THE BIG PRIZE

The big prize, of course, is oil. There's no doubt that foreign companies will be called in to operate Iraq's petroleum system after the war; the question is whether they will remain in place indefinitely and perhaps even have an ownership interest. Some people seem to think that should be the case. In December, the authors of the Heritage Foundation report published an article in the online version of the arch-conservative *National Review* that was headlined PRIVATIZE IRAQI OIL. The *Los Angeles Times* reported in February that a State Department advisory panel of exiled Iraqi petroleum professionals recommended privatization of the country's oil resources, but only after US military administration has been replaced by a new sovereign government.

The Bush Administration has tended to speak in platitudes about using oil revenues to benefit the Iraqi people, but it is significant that the person reported to have been chosen to oversee postwar oil production is a former chief executive officer of Shell Oil Company. Philip Carroll also worked as chief executive for Fluor Corp., one of the big engineering companies that had been invited to bid on the main reconstruction contract.

Carroll's potential conflicts of interest are not the biggest problem for the Bush Administration in its plans for postwar oil exploitation. The *Washington Post* is reporting today that United Nations and British officials are arguing that the US would not have the legal authority to take over Iraq's oil operations, even on an interim basis, without a new Security Council mandate, given the fact that those operations have been under the supervision of the U.N.'s oil-for-food program.

In January, Platt's Oilgram News reported that a 1976 State Department Memorandum of Law, written after Israel had taken control of Sinai oil fields originally developed by Egypt, had concluded that international law did not support the right of an occupying power to grant an oil development concession. It would not be surprising to learn that the State Department is now seeking a new legal opinion.

To the victor go the spoils, it is said. In the case of this war, the spoils will be going to the victor's business allies as they bring a distinctly corporate form of liberation to the people of Iraq.

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A WAR ON THE CHILDREN, NOT ON SADDAM Report of the Asian Peace Mission To Iraq, 13 - 18 March 2003

In justifying its war on Iraq, the United States has swung between claiming that the country harbors weapons of mass destruction and terrorists to saying that its president is a brutal tyrant who needs to be deposed in order to 'liberate' the Iraqi people.

The first reason is obviously a non-starter given that the case for this justification has been found to be built on forged documents, plagiarized dossiers, and exaggerated intelligence. No less than the UN's chief inspector Hans Blix has openly accused the US of fabricating evidence; even the FBI and the CIA were reported to have protested against the distortion of their intelligence reports. Clearly, the UN weapons inspection process has led to and still continues to lead to the disarmament of the country. There is no reason to stop it now.

An Asian Peace Mission, composed of civil society leaders and parliamentarians, went to Iraq on the eve of war not only to express Asian solidarity with fellow Asians, but also to see for themselves the real condition of the Iraqi people and the possible effects of war on the population.

The team was headed by Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales, chair of the Committee of Human Rights of the Philippine House of Representatives. Its members include Rep. Hussin Amin, also of the Philippine Congress, representing Sulu province where US troops are planned to be sent for actual combat; Dita Sari, a labor leader from Indonesia and recipient of the prestigious Magsaysay award; Walden Bello, executive director of Focus on the Global South, a regional policy research and advocacy center with offices in Manila, Mumbai, and Bangkok; and Zulfiqar Ali Gondal, a Member of Pakistan's National Assembly.

The team came out of Baghdad hours before the deadline of the US ultimatum convinced of at least one thing: This will not be a war against Saddam Hussein. This will be a war against the Iraqi people, half of whom are children. They have been suffering from an ongoing war, waged in the form of economic sanctions, and their suffering will only be exacerbated by another war.

Moreover, the oft-debunked yet still oft-repeated analogy between Saddam Hussein and Adolf Hitler that is used to exaggerate the threat of Iraq - and to justify the war - does not stand. Germany in Hitler's time was the most advanced industrialized nation in the world. The mission members found out for themselves that Iraq, contrary to popular depiction, is a country that has been effectively brought down to its knees. It is a ravaged nation.

"ARE THESE THE PEOPLE YOU ARE PLANNING TO KILL?"

The team arrived in Damascus on Thursday, March 13, but - after hours of waiting at the airport - only managed to fly into Baghdad Friday night.

After the parliamentary members' courtesy call on the Speaker of the Iraqi national assembly in the morning of March 15, the peace mission immediately took off for the Al Mansour Children's Hospital to see for themselves some of the worst effects of the ongoing embargo against the country.

In the aftermath of the first Gulf War in 1991, the United States, working through the United Nations, prohibited Iraq's importation of products that they fear could be used for the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction. In practice, this has meant that thousands of sick children have been denied access to medicine and medical services. According to the United Nations, up to half a million children have died as a direct result of the economic sanctions.

At the hospital, the peace mission visited Salah, a five year-old leukemia patient who is only waiting for certain death. His life could have been saved had he undergone radiotherapy but the chemicals needed have been effectively out of reach because of US fears that these might be used for producing nuclear weapons. Cases of cancer after have increased considerably after the United States used depleted uranium in attacking Iraq during the Gulf War.

The mission also met Murtazan, a three year-old child suffering from lymphoma who may yet survive but only if his treatment continues - an uncertain possibility given the arbitrary and often delayed approval of requests for medicine.

According to Dr Murtada Hassan, the shortage in drugs has been a catastrophe for Iraqi children. Before the sanctions in 1989, an average of only 56 in 1000 children under five years old died every year. In 1999, that number more than doubled to 131 per 1000 children. At Dr Hassan's hospital alone, two to three children now die every week because of different kinds of cancers and complications.

"I feel very sorry when I go to the ward and stand beside my patient," Dr Hassan told the mission members. "I can do nothing for him simply because the drug is not available."

Dr Hassan, who cannot even afford to buy updated medicinal books - much less attend international medical conferences - toured the mission members around the hospital. Economic pressures caused by the embargo, he explained, have meant deteriorating hospital facilities. Of the eight elevators, only two works. There is no Internet connection.

With only a limited number of air-conditioners working, Dr Hassan said most hospital rooms would become unbearably hot once summer comes and temperature hits as high as 60 degrees centigrade. And Al Mansour is already one of the country's premier hospitals. Conditions are so much worse in most of the other hospitals.

Dr Hassan pointedly observed how the US, with its use of depleted uranium during the war, caused the sickness of thousands of Iraqi children. Now, with its enforcement of economic sanctions, it is preventing their treatment and, in effect, ensuring their painful death.

After meeting the children who are yet to die in the cancer ward, the mission were guided to the hospital's art room where Dr Hassan showed the paintings and craftworks of those Iraqi children who have already died. Hanging on the wall were pictures of young Iraqi patients, accompanied with the question, "Mr Bush, are these the people you are planning to kill?" At one point, Dr Hassan, took some pictures displayed on the shelves, saying, "This one, we lost last week. That one, we lost a month ago."

HEALTHY ENOUGH TO DIE

The peace mission then proceeded to the headquarters of the UNICEF in Baghdad. There they were further briefed on the condition of Iraqi children by the UNICEF's representative to the country, Dr. Carel de Rooy. The picture he painted was dire and bleak. Iraq has one of the world's worst child mortality rates in the world. In the last decade, it had the greatest increase in mortality rates - worse even than those of the poorest countries in the world. This does not come as a surprise given that the incidence of preventable diseases has increased by more than 100% since 1990. Five million Iraqis lack access to safe water. Eighty percent of them eat too little. Of the women, three out of five are anemic. The percentage of children under five who are chronically malnourished is, in de Rooy's words, "absurdly high."

De Rooy stressed that the sanctions are not solely to blame. "But the sanctions have hurt and they have hurt tremendously." At the root of the Iraqis' woes, de Rooy conceded, is the economic embargo.

In response to the impending war, the UNICEF is making sure that the Iraqis will at least be healthy enough to resist the sicknesses that war will bring, de Rooy said. If the US attacks power installations and water and sewage treatment plants again, as they did in 1991, the result will be catastrophic in terms of hygiene and the spread of diseases.

What the UNICEF would be doing, in other words, is - given the strong possibility of a widespread outbreak of diseases - merely to make sure that the children will be healthy enough to die.

THE REAL TERRORISM

After visiting the sick and the dying, the mission went on to visit the dead.

In February 1991, as the US-led coalition began pounding Baghdad with bombs, scores of families hid at the Al Amiriya bomb shelter in the hope of surviving the war. The thick walls of the structure proved to be no protection.

Around 4am on February 12, a daisy cutter bomb launched by the United States fell on its roof, bore a three-meter hole through floors, and exploded. Four hundred and seven people, most of them sleeping women and children, were instantly killed. It is a number that current US State Secretary Colin Powell - asked in 1991 about how many civilians were killed in the war - is "not terribly interested in."

The pictures of these 407 war crime victims now line some of the halls of the Al Amiriya shelter, now a museum that preserves the way the place looked like in the aftermath of the bombing. The walls are still black from the ash and the soot. The big gaping hole through the roof and floors has become its central attraction. Mangled and bent wires and rods snake across the pillars. Dark and thick bloodstains forming the outline of the bodies of the victims still mark the floors.

In that instant when the bomb exploded, a mother who was cradling her baby was violently thrown off against the wall, leaving a visible outline reminiscent of "Madonna and child" against the black canvas of the wall.

"This is the real terrorism," remarked a visitor who was moved to tears by pictures of the roasted charred bodies recovered after the bombing.

In the evening, the mission paid a courtesy call to Abdul Razzaq Al-Hashmi, former ambassador to Germany and France, who argued that the economic sanctions and the threat of war have turned Iraq into a giant refugee camp where people do nothing but eat and sleep.

MORE SELF-RELIANT

The following day, March 16, the mission started the day by visiting the Iraqi Ministry of Health. Dr Umaid Mubarak, the Minister of Health, elaborated on the effects of the embargo and the war. He recounted how the offices of the health ministry was among those that were bombed as military targets during the previous war. For some reason, drug stores and medical dispensaries were also destroyed.

Mubarak riled against the unfair and unjust manner by which the sanctions were being enforced and the

process by which the Oil for Food Program was being implemented. Under this program, Iraq is allowed to sell its oil then use its revenues for buying what it needs. But what it needs only a special UN committee virtually controlled by the United States can determine.

Iraq can only make requests for certain items, including medicines, subject to the approval of this special committee. This process has not only been tedious, it has also often been capricious. Requests for certain items which could theoretically be used for chemical weapons but which are absolutely necessary for certain medical treatment have been turned down. As much as \$5.2 billion worth of requests for goods and medicine- earned by Iraq in the form of oil revenues- still have to be delivered to people in dire need of them.

Despite this, Mubarak told the mission that the Iraqi people have not only managed to get by, they have also been forced to be more self-reliant and self-sufficient. "We have become different Iraqis since 1991," he said.

LIKE TYBALT

At the Baghdad University, the peace mission members saw for themselves the academic community's defiant resolve not to let war get in the way of their education. On the eve of war, there were classes as usual. Students were milling on the school's corridors, playing volleyball on the grounds, or - in one class - studying William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet. The team walked into this English literature class and spoke with around fifty, mostly female, college students to ask them what they thought of the coming war.

The students knew what this war was about and what it was not about. They knew their history by heart. On US President George Bush's pronouncements that they're bombing Iraq to liberate them, one student retorted, "That's what those who wanted to conquer Iraq through the centuries all said."

The US and its allies hope that the suffering wrought by the embargo and the war will compel the Iraqi people to rise up against Saddam Hussein. Instead, they're only solidifying their support for him. This was evident in the way student after student expressed their support for the regime and their disgust for Bush. "He's like Tybalt," one student, alluding to a character in Romeo and Juliet, was moved to say.

Professor Abdul Sattar Jawad said that while some buildings in the university were bombed in 1991, he and his students still see the school as their refuge. He recounted how, back then, a Ph.D candidate was defending his dissertation even as bombs were falling down elsewhere in the city.

Jawad thinks the idea that Iraqis will be cheering out of

the streets and welcoming their “liberators” when they arrive in Baghdad is wishful thinking. He says that the embargo has definitely affected the educational system by making it difficult to import books and by making it impossible for him to attend international academic conferences.

Jawad, who lectures on American writers like William Faulkner and F. Scott Fitzgerald, said he’s finding it increasingly difficult to teach his students to distinguish between American culture and American aggression. In the face of a hailstorm of bombs, he asks, “How can I convince my students that American culture or democracy is good?”

But he is convinced and, it seems, so are his students. Asked whether the books they’re studying shows that the United States is inherently aggressive and violent, the students were unanimous in saying “No.” All of the students agreed that continuing to go to school is their strongest statement in showing their resolve not to be dampened by the threat of war. Staying at home, they said, is already a sign of despair and surrender.

INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

After the visit to the university, the mission went to the Press Center at the Ministry of Information building where scores of international news organizations have set up offices and have even put up camps to monitor the situation in Baghdad. During the press conference attended by reporters of media outfits from Europe, Canada, and the Middle East, the mission discussed their objectives for coming to Baghdad at this critical time.

Rep. Etta Rosales stressed that the mission hopes to express a strong message of Asian solidarity to their fellow Asians, the Iraqi people. Rep. Hussin Amin emphasized that his district in Mindanao may soon be the next target of American military deployment. Zulfiqar Gondal answered questions about the sentiment of the Pakistani people regarding the war. Dita Sari shared the Indonesian people’s sympathy for their fellow Muslims who will be most affected by the conflict.

The press conference was broadcast that evening on Iraqi and Arab television, enabling the team to accomplish one of its primary objectives: to convey the message of Asian solidarity directly to the Iraqi people in their hour of need.

Afterwards, some of the mission members went to Baghdad’s Freedom Square to attend the unveiling of a giant anti-war mural painted by famous Korean artist Choi Byung Soo. There they met other peace delegations from Mexico, Japan, and Korea. At one point, the mission was approached by a man struggling to say in English that Iraqis were very happy to have all of them in their city.

In the evening, the team organized an Asian Solidarity Night to gather and discuss with representatives of many of the other foreign contingents who have gathered in Baghdad to oppose the war. They shared their findings, insights, and plans with peace activists from as varied a set of countries as Australia, Ukraine, Russia, Italy, Canada, Sweden, South Korea, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

They also used the occasion to formally acknowledge the invaluable assistance of Kathy Kelly from Voices in the Wilderness, the organization that has been sending batches of Americans to Baghdad, including some 9-11 victims; Han Sang Jin of the Nonviolent Peaceforce-Korea; Wadah Qasimy and Hasan al-Baghdadi of the Iraqi foreign ministry; and Fahdi Hefashy, honorary consul of the Philippines to Syria; and Grace Escalante, Philippine consul general to Iraq.

Some of the foreign delegates who were in Iraq plan to stay on even during the war. They give themselves just a twenty per cent survival rate in case war breaks out. A number of them are determined to camp out as “human shields” to protect military targets such as hospitals, bridges, power installations, and water treatment plants. Bombing these sites is considered a war crime.

EVACUATION

The program of activities was independently designed and discussed by the mission members - not imposed or pre-arranged by the Iraqi government. In between the events, the mission had the chance to interact with Iraqis from all walks of life - taxi drivers, waiters, government employees, shopkeepers, policemen, etc. These interactions were spontaneous and random - not guided by minders from the Iraqi government.

By the night of March 16, the Palestine Hotel, where the mission and many other foreign journalists and peace activists were staying, was abuzz with the news of Bush’s final ultimatum to the United Nations and Saddam. Not a few delegates were seen openly shedding tears and bidding goodbye to those who were leaving and those who were staying.

The team was originally planning to stay on until the night of March 17 - possibly even the 18th - but by this time, it had been announced that the flight back to Damascus had been cancelled. The price of renting vans for overland trips across the border had more than tripled and there was less and less assurance of securing one as staff of embassies, UN agencies, as well as Iraqis scrambled for vehicles. The evacuation of Baghdad began even before the mission arrived but accelerated on the night of March 16, the even of the US ultimatum on Iraq to disarm.

It was for these reasons that despite their intent to continue their fact-finding mission, the mission was forced to pack up and leave the following morning,

heeding the urgent and insistent advice of the Philippine consul general. On the road to Damascus, the mission encountered cars ferrying families fleeing to safer ground and forming long queues at the gasoline stations.

As the team was leaving the country at the Iraq-Syria border, the team chanced upon and talked with a group of volunteers from Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, and Syria who were entering Iraq to fight the United States and its allied troops. After a grueling 15-hour trip, the peace mission arrived in Damascus on March 18 then left for Manila, Jakarta, and Karachi the next day.

The mission promised to bring the message of the Iraqi people back home to their respective countries: This is not a war against terrorists. This is not a war against Saddam. This is a war against the Iraqi people, especially the children who make up half of the population.

MISSION MEMBERS:

Rep. Loretta Ann Rosales, Head of Mission, Akbayan! party-list representative to the Philippine House of Representatives and chair of the Committee on Human Rights

Prof. Walden Bello, executive director, Focus on the Global South (Mumbai, Bangkok, Manila)

Zulfiqar Ali Gondal, Member of Pakistan's National Assembly

Dita Sari, labor leader from Indonesia, Magsaysay awardee, 2001

Rep. Hussin Amin, representative of the first district of Sulu, Philippine House of Representatives

Jim Libiran and Ariel Fulgado, reporter and cameraman from "The Correspondents," a television documentary show

Herbert Docena, Research Associate, Focus on the Global South

WTO GRIDLOCK: LOWERING EXPECTATIONS AND LOOKING FOR SCAPEGOATS

By Nicola Bullard

Just two weeks into the war on Iraq, journalists and politicians were already starting to see the useful tie-in between the breakdown in transatlantic relations and the deadlock in the WTO. The timing is perfect: with just five months to Cancun, an agenda that's simply not moving and a long summer holiday in between, it's a good idea to start lowering expectations and looking for scapegoats.

The state of play in the WTO at the end of March is this: There is no agreement on how to proceed with the agriculture negotiations. There has been no progress in the implementation of special and differential treatment (a key issue for developing countries) and there is no resolution in sight on the application of the TRIPS and Public Health Declaration, hailed as the biggest gain for developing countries at Doha. The agenda is totally blocked and there is no sign of movement on any front.

The Economist ('Will there be a breakthrough?' 1 April 2003) pinpoints agriculture as the main sticking point and has no doubt about who is to blame. "The battle lines are clear - and they are uncomfortably reminiscent of the transatlantic dispute about policy in Iraq," they write, adding, in case there should be any doubt, that "The French president, Jacques Chirac, stitched up a deal with his German counterpart, Gerhard Schroeder, last October to ensure that the CAP [the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy] would be protected for years to come. Efforts are nevertheless underway to reform the CAP, but if they fail, the chance of progress in the Doha talks will shrink."

Clare Short, UK Secretary for International Development and a booster for the "Doha Development Round", also hones in on agriculture and sheets home the blame for stalled talks to "some Member States" who are resisting CAP reform.

"If their view prevails," she told the Royal Institute for International Affairs in London on 27 March, "the prospects for a success in the Doha Round will become very small indeed and the EU will be the guilty party in throwing away the prospect of a development round."

The Financial Times' Guy de Jonquieres ('Enlightened cooperation has turned into indecision', 30 March 2003) also blames the EU's failure to push through CAP reforms as the stumbling block in WTO agriculture negotiations and is pessimistic that the Commission will be able to push through enough proposals to keep the agriculture talks moving because, he says "it is unclear that member states, France above all, will go along."

These three commentators give us an insight into what the Anglo-American, pro-WTO, pro-trade world is thinking, and it's very interesting.

First, the view is now widespread that the Cancun talks are teetering on a knife-edge. As de Jonquieres says "the WTO may face an agonising choice: to defer its Cancun meeting and risk further loss of momentum; or to go ahead and risk the event turning into a savage blood-letting."

Second, the US - in spite of its persistent and deadly disregard for multilateralism - comes out smelling like roses. While *The Economist*, de Jonquieres and Short make reference to the hikes in US steel tariffs and hint that the US, too, should "open its markets", the real opprobrium is heaped on continental Europe (that is, France and Germany).

Third — and this is very telling — the other 129 members of the WTO are virtually invisible in this analysis of what's going on inside the WTO. In spite of Secretary Short's heartfelt desire that the "development round" succeed and her conviction that trade is good for the poor, she seems to have no interest in the negotiating positions of developing countries, especially when they contradict what she knows to be good for them. (According to Ms Short, what developing countries need is a "compromise" agreement on TRIPS and Health, more market liberalisation, more foreign investment, and the chance to send their low-skilled workers to the First World.)

What's more, this absence of developing countries as interested parties highlights the main function of the WTO — that is, to balance transatlantic trade relations — and when they go belly-up, so does the WTO. We know this already from Seattle where deep divisions between the EU and the US contributed to the collapse of the ministerial. Developing countries are mere spectators.

Finally, what we are seeing is an attempt to re-cycle the post-September 11 hysteria which created an atmosphere where developing countries were bullied into agreements in Doha according to the line in the sand marked by George W. Bush: you are either with us or you are against us. Aileen Kwa's report, *Power Politics in the WTO* (see www.focusweb.org) gives a scrupulous account of the behind the scenes arm-twisting that helped "ease" through the Doha Declaration. Three months ago, these bullying tactics may have seemed beyond credulity but now they are a matter of public record as we have seen the US attempt to buy support for the war.

In her address to the Royal Institute, Clare Short made a gallant attempt to re-mount the post-September 11 argument:

"Just as the aftermath of September 11 helped focus

minds at Doha on why trade and development matter," she says, "we need to deepen our commitment to a just world order if we are to emerge from the current levels of bitterness and division in the world. We urgently need stronger resolve to make the Development Round succeed."

Coming from the minister who threatened to resign over Iraq, changed her mind and is now speaking as a Cabinet member of the government that embarked on an illegal war, against the will of the vast majority of its citizen, this really takes some beating.

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PASCAL LAMY HOLDS COURT AT THE ORIENTAL

By Walden Bello and Chanida Bamford*

On April 1, 2003, in what was described as an effort to “reach out” to civil society, European Union Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy met with representatives of several Bangkok-based NGOs at the riverfront Oriental Hotel. While the meeting did not produce fresh revelations on the ongoing World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, it nevertheless yielded interesting insights on the EU’s negotiating perspective, strategy, and tactics.

THE HARBINSON DRAFT: A TACTICAL BLUNDER

Not surprisingly, agriculture dominated the agenda of the brief one-hour meeting. Lamy had few nice things to say about the draft agreement on agriculture prepared by chief agricultural negotiator Stuart Harbinson. With negotiators in Geneva missing the March 31 deadline for agreement on the modalities of a new agreement, Lamy put the blame squarely on Harbinson, whom he charged with committing a “tactical mistake” for being “too precise” in his proposals for liberalization “at this stage of the discussion.” This was obviously referring to the tariff and subsidy cuts that Harbinson proposed, which the EU considers too deep.

“We don’t like the Harbinson draft,” Lamy declared flatly, and he went on to cite two reasons. “First,” he said, “it does not take into account non-trade concerns, such as sustainability, the link to the environment, rural landscape, and animal welfare. In agriculture, you do not just produce a commodity but also a service, a collective good that doesn’t belong to just anybody, which means you need not just trade policy but public policy.” The EU, in short, is not retreating on its stand on “multifunctionality.”

The second reason cited by Lamy was Harbinson’s lack of flexibility in dealing with EU subsidies and other forms of domestic support. According to him, the draft failed to recognize several trends. One, that EU export subsidies are one-fourth of what they were ten years ago. Two, that the EU offer is substantial — “fifty per cent reduction in domestic support, fifty per cent reduction in export subsidies, and increasing market access by one third.” Third, the Harbinson draft does not reflect appreciation of the fact while the US has been moving towards “market distorting” mechanisms to support its farming interests, the EU “has been moving towards non-trade distorting forms of subsidization by adopting Green Box measures like direct payments to farmers decoupled from production.”

Was there anything positive in the Harbinson draft?

Yes, said Lamy, pointing to what he called the “food security box.” This proposal would allow developing countries to list a few “strategic products” which would be subject to less tariff reduction than other agricultural products. Unlike Lamy, it might be noted, many developing country representatives have dismissed it as a feeble concession that cannot balance the detrimental consequences of the comprehensive liberalization that their agricultural sectors will undergo.

Lamy was at pains to paint EU agriculture as sharing a similar dilemma as many developing economies. He claimed that like many developing economies, the EU was largely an importer when it came to agriculture. “We only export a bit,” he claimed, implying that the impact of its domestic support and export subsidies on global markets was limited.

EXPLOITING DEVELOPING COUNTRY DIFFERENCES

He went on to assert that two camps of developing countries had developed in the current agricultural negotiations: the big agro-exporters that were members of the Cairns Group and the other developing countries. “There’s Brazil, on the one hand, and there’s India,” he said. Brazil and Thailand were painted as strong promoters of liberalized trade, which Lamy doubted was in the interest of other developing countries. African countries, he claimed, “could not live with liberalized trade in agriculture.”

While Lamy claimed that there “has to be a compromise between these two camps,” in fact, the EU has moved quickly to exploit the conflict to fortify its negotiating position. On February 28, the EU, Norway, and Switzerland presented a statement signed by many developing countries, including India, endorsing a Uruguay Round formula for tariff cuts, which would provide more leeway in protecting sensitive products than the Harbinson formula. According to Focus on the Global South analyst Aileen Kwa, “this left the US and Cairns Group stumped and feeling quite isolated in their pro-liberalization approach.”

Moving to implementation issues, Lamy disagreed with the charge that the Doha Declaration put implementation issues—the top agenda item for developing countries—on the backburner. “In fact,” he contended, “the Doha Declaration integrated implementation issues for the first time as a central agenda item. This was the big prize for the developing countries.” He acknowledged, however, that negotiations on implementation had not gone forward, but he put the blame squarely on developing countries

whom he claimed “could not agree on the top two or five implementation issues to be discussed.”

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

Asked whether the current round of negotiations was threatened with derailment owing to lack of progress, Lamy affected not to be worried. On agriculture, he said, “we are only halfway in the negotiations—we have till the end of 2004.” There were different rates of progress in the different areas under negotiations, he said, with “some areas already one third done and others one two thirds done.” He cited the negotiations on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) as “98 per cent complete, with all of us knowing what that remaining two per cent is.” This was a rather bizarre way of describing the way the US has blocked any movement in negotiations with its demand that, contrary to the Doha Declaration’s broad intent, patent restrictions on the production and export of drugs be lifted only for a few specified diseases.

Lamy, it seemed, was in the early stages of managing expectations about the outcome of the Cancun Ministerial in September. A gap between the expectations of significant new liberalization that the EU trade commissioner himself has helped cultivate and actual meagre results would be a political disaster that would practically stymie negotiations in all other areas after Cancun and set the stage for the specter haunting Lamy and other free traders: the reversal of globalization.

* Walden Bello and Chanida Bamford are members of the Trade Campaign Team of Focus on the Global South.

WTO AGRICULTURE TALKS SET TO EXACERBATE WORLD HUNGER

By Aileen Kwa

One person dies every four seconds because of hunger, 24,000 people die of hunger or hunger-related illnesses daily. (1) One in every five persons in the developing world is chronically undernourished; the majority women and children.

At the WTO, talks and more talks on agriculture trade are not likely to alleviate this trend, but to exacerbate it, yet world leaders and policy makers seem to have become desensitized to such suffering. Their focus remains steadfast on the profits of their agri-business corporations and the global markets they can pry open.

Four years of pleas by some developing countries’ negotiators for rules that will address their food security and rural employment problems have resulted nothing more than lip service paid to these issues at the WTO. It has already been revealed by studies that the currently iniquitous trade rules have exacerbated rural poverty and hunger. Instead of remaining steadfast in their demands for equity, or even the full right to defend themselves against the onslaught of subsidized food dumped on their doorsteps, developing country negotiators are scrambling to secure the crumbs that fall from the negotiating table at which the US, EU and the more powerful members of the Cairns Group are seated.

LET’S GET SOME FACTS STRAIGHT: DISTORTIONS IN THE WORLD MARKET AND THE IMPACT ON DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Developing countries are becoming more dependent on food imports - especially in staple commodities. While cereals make up at least half of people’s calorie intake in the developing world, cereal production is increasingly moving towards the OECD countries and a handful of developing countries, such as Brazil and Argentina. And to make matters worse, it is these cereals and key staple commodities which are most heavily subsidized by the OECD governments and dumped in developing countries - wheat, soya, corn, rice, and also dairy products. These are also the commodities Northern agri-business corporations are controlling - both in the developed as well as the developing world. That is, the same giant companies controlling the trade in cereals in the US are operating in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina.

This story can partly be gleaned from the trade figures. In the recent years, food imports to developing countries have surged, while exports by developing countries have more or less remained stagnant. Developing countries’ exports on the world market amounted to 26 per cent of trade in 1995-1997, about

the same share as in 1980. Developing countries' share of imports, while only 28 per cent in the 1970s, surged to 37 per cent in 1997. The import increases are even more stark for least developed countries (LDCs) and net food importing developing countries (NFIDCs) - with food imports for LDCs increasing by almost 50 percent between the early 1980s and 1997 (from US\$3.9 billion to US\$6 billion), and by 40 per cent for the 19 NFIDCs, from US\$9.3 billion to \$13 billion.

The food deficit in developing countries is increasing. Not only are developing countries increasingly dependent on imports for their basic food needs, sky rocketing food import bills are also becoming a major burden.

The US Farm Bill endorsed by President Bush in May 2002 raises US spending on agriculture by US\$73.5 billion in the next decade, an increase of more than 63 per cent. The Bill provides supports mainly on eight crops - all important for livelihoods in developing countries - cotton, wheat, corn, soybeans, rice, barley, oats, and sorghum. Most of these supports will be provided in the form of direct payments. Today, US is already dumping produce in Third World markets, exporting corn at twenty per cent below the cost of production, and wheat at 46 per cent below cost. Cotton prices in the US have also been slashed by 66 per cent since 1995 to fifty cents a pound in order to undercut Third World producers, while US producers are receiving 75 cents in subsidies. The Farm Bill will aggravate such distortions.

In the parlance of the WTO, these are supposedly non-trade distorting subsidies since they are de-linked from production. The present Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) allows these subsidies (Green Box programmes) to be provided without limits. That they are non-trade distorting is patently untrue, since they obviously increase the income and lessen the risks for producers, hence encouraging more production. The artificially low prices make the commodities competitive on the world market. While farmers in the North are compensated for these low prices, Third World farmers, on the other hand, are being wiped out.

The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is also little different. In fact, the explicit policy of the EU is to shift their export subsidies and, increasingly, their 'production limiting supports' (usually known as Blue Box payments) into direct payments (Green Box) which are presently legalized by the WTO. Like the US, the argument they use is that Green Box programmes distort trade less. The shift away from export subsidies in the WTO is presently well-received. However, developing countries should watch out for these subsidies re-emerging in another form. Experience is already indicative. The EU reduced export funding on cereals by 60 per cent between 1992 and 1999, from 2200 million euros to 883 million euros. However, cereal producers were given direct

payments up to the tune of 2102 million euros during the same period. The total subsidies in fact increased by 36 per cent. (2) If in fact these direct payments were really non-trade distorting and de-linked from production, production levels should have contracted. The EU's intervention price was after all fifty per cent lower. However, the increased levels of direct aid payments led to 25 per cent increase in EU cereals production. (3) Therefore, not only are subsidies increasing, but the mechanisms of export dumping are becoming much less transparent, making it much more difficult for developing countries' policy makers to argue against such practices. Countries which have trade arrangements with the EU are particularly vulnerable, for example, the over 70 ACP countries where the EU is presently negotiating reciprocal trade agreements. 'Competitively' priced EU products will be flooding those markets and the ACP countries will effectively become the EU's dumping ground.

The increasing dependence of developing countries' on world markets for their food - and the increasingly distorted world markets - is extremely worrying. While only two per cent of the population are agricultural producers in the US, and five per cent in the EU, 75 - 80 per cent in China, 77 per cent in Kenya, 67 per cent in India, and 82 per cent in Senegal depend on farming for their livelihoods and source of food.

The FAO has concluded that increased trade is not sufficient to alleviate poverty.

'For [the poor and food insecure in developing countries], economic access is assured only if they produce the food themselves or have economic means to purchase, which in the current state of their economies must come from increased food and agricultural production.' (4)

IMPLICATIONS OF THE HARBINSON TEXT AND THE MAIN FIGHTS IN AGRICULTURE

The main fight in agriculture is over market access. The food-producing giants, from the US to many in the Cairns Group, and also the EU, are hungry for markets. The Chair of the Agriculture Committee, Mr Harbinson, released a first draft of the 'modalities' paper of the new WTO Agreement on Agriculture on the 12 February, and a (marginally) revised version released on 18 March. Since then, the exporting giants have been in a brawl over exactly how deep tariffs cuts are going to be. Harbinson proposed these different brackets of tariff cuts:

- 1) Tariffs above 90 per cent should be cut by 60 per cent and a minimum of 45 per cent per tariff line. For developing countries, tariffs greater than 120 per cent will be slashed by 40 per cent on average, and a minimum of 30 per cent per tariff line.
- 2) Tariffs between 15 and 90 per cent should be reduced by 50 per cent on average, with a minimum of 35 per cent per tariff line. For developing countries, tariffs between 60 and 120 per cent should be reduced

by 35 per cent, with a minimum cut of 25 per cent per tariff line, and tariffs between 20 and 60 per cent will be reduced by 30 per cent, with a minimum cut of 20 per cent.

3) Tariffs 15 per cent or lower are to be cut by 40 per cent, with a 25 per cent minimum cut per tariff line. For developing countries, tariffs lower than 20 per cent are to be cut by 25 per cent on average, with a minimum of 15 per cent per tariff line. The feeble peace offering handed out to developing countries is Harbinson's idea of 'strategic products' (SP) 'with respect to food security, rural development and/or livelihood security concerns'. Developing countries can declare some products 'SP' products, but these will still be subject to tariff reduction commitments - despite their sensitivity! Tariffs on SP products have to be reduced by 10 per cent on average, and a minimum of 5 per cent per tariff line over 10 years.

In current talks, positions are polarized - with the US and Cairns Group (Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Malaysia, Thailand, Chile etc) on one side versus the EU and a large following of developing countries on the other. The US and the Cairns Group have complained that the tariff cuts in the Harbinson draft have not gone deep enough. They are pushing for more ambitious tariff reductions through the Swiss Formula. (5) The EU, reluctant to open up its domestic markets, is complaining that the cuts proposed by Harbinson are too steep. The EU has sensitive products in the 15 - 90 per cent tariff bracket. Japan, Norway and Switzerland on the other hand are most concerned about the tariff cuts above the 90 per cent bracket. To undertake the level of cuts proposed by Harbinson would threaten their ability to retain their domestic markets for their own producers. The EU and its allies instead are advocating a Uruguay Round formula, as was adopted in the last Agreement on Agriculture. At that time, developed countries were required to cut tariffs by 36 per cent on average, and a minimum of 15 per cent per tariff line. This led to many developed countries cutting their sensitive products only by the required 15 per cent per tariff line. They made deeper cuts on less sensitive products as well as products which had low tariff levels. (6)

In their attempts to garner support, the EU, Norway and Switzerland have embarked on a campaign to lobby developing countries on to their side in supporting the Uruguay Round formula approach. On 28 February 2003, they presented a statement with 75 signatures to the Committee on Agriculture endorsing a Uruguay Round formula to tariff cuts. This left the US and the Cairns Group stumped and feeling quite isolated in their pro-liberalisation approach.

Obviously, many of these signatories came from developing countries, particularly the ACP countries (which receive some preferential market access to the EU markets), as well as India. However, countries that

have not endorsed the statement include Venezuela, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Dominican Republic and Honduras for a variety of reasons. Some declined to support the EU because they did not want to be seen as closely allied to the EU, since it may have implications on their position on domestic supports (Most developing countries want domestic supports lowered whereas the EU wants to maintain these). One negotiator explained that they had not endorsed the EU position since they could live with the Harbinson text as long as the SP concept is developed further. Another said that they could live with any formula as long as their sensitive low bound tariffs are not cut. These low bound tariffs seem to be threatened by both the Uruguay Round formula as well as an ambitious Swiss formula. Yet another said that the Uruguay Round approach would not target tariff peaks and escalations which developing countries have complained about for so long and despite attempts by the EU to get them on board.

To further complicate matters, exporting developing countries in the Cairns Group - particularly Argentina, Brazil, Malaysia, Thailand Costa Rica and Chile have joined hands with the US and Australia to push aggressively for market opening. In fact, developing countries attempting to protect the livelihood of small farmers, and hence requesting for the expansion of the SP category of crops are aggressively being opposed by these other developing countries arguing that such measures could impede South-South trade.

For now, the positions are so entrenched that the 31 March deadline for modalities to be agreed upon has been missed.

WHEREFORE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: ROUND II OF AOA TRADE TRICKS?

Many trade tricks were employed in the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture, which led to developed countries slipping out of any commitment to liberalise. It is well-known that domestic support levels since 1995 have increased significantly and that 'dirty tariffication' was employed so that tariffs increased rather than decreased in many developed countries. Small farmers, wiped out of their livelihoods, the rural poor and hungry, have paid the heaviest price. Unfortunately, the current Harbinson draft offers nothing but more of the same for them.

The tariff cuts proposed go much further than the last round, where developing countries had to cut tariffs by 24 per cent on average and a 10 per cent minimum cut per tariff line. At the same time, absolutely nothing is being proposed to eliminate the distortions in the world market. The domestic support modalities Harbinson has proposed will only allow the status quo to continue, and in fact worsen. Developing countries have been repeating - like broken records — that the market access modalities and domestic supports and export subsidies modalities have to be linked. This has

been ignored by Harbinson. Developing countries have called for a cap in overall domestic support levels, and particularly a cap on the Green Box. Again, these recommendations do not feature. Much has been made of Harbinson's proposal to eliminate export subsidies over nine years. However, as mentioned above, it is already the explicit policy of the European Union (the main provider of export subsidies) not to remove these subsidies, but merely to shift them into the Green Box.

With these distortions set to continue, the SP concept proposed by Harbinson - hailed by some developing countries as a success since their food security and livelihood concerns have been reflected, albeit inadequately - is no more than wool being pulled over the eyes of trade negotiators and Ministers. It is a fictitious fig leaf offered to entice the less WTO savvy politicians in the developing world.

Firstly, tariff levels on SP products must also be cut - by an average of 10 per cent. This is no less than the 10 per cent minimum cut per tariff line developing countries had to take on in the last round. Any relief felt by negotiators is not likely to be echoed in the rural plains.

Secondly, the number of SP products each country can declare is already being disputed from all sides. Developed countries and Cairns Group developing countries have asked for strict criteria that would make the instrument quite useless as a defense mechanism when practically applied. For instance, developed countries could come up with a criteria that an SP product will have to account for 20 per cent of a country's total production, or be a crop where a significant percentage of people depend on for the livelihood. This could work for certain countries which are highly dependent on two or three commodities. However, for others - particularly developing countries with diverse land and environmental conditions and hence a huge diversity of crops which small farmers depend on - many more crops need to be protected. The aggressiveness with which the Cairns Group is showing in opposing flexibility in the SP concept is also likely to limit its final utility.

The other issue developing countries have been lobbying for is a safeguard mechanism, which would allow them to increase their tariff levels when prices dip below a trigger price, or when there is an import surge. The complainant is not required to show that imports have caused injury before the mechanism is triggered. Developing countries have asked for such a mechanism in order to protect their small farmers against the volatility of world prices. An increase in tariffs would only be implemented temporarily. The existing safeguard mechanism is only available to 37 countries. Only seven countries - all developed countries - have actually made use of it. Developing countries have asked that the mechanism is applied only by developing countries.

The Harbinson draft deals a severe blow to developing countries' safeguard request. Developed countries will eventually be graduated from being able to use this mechanism but only at the end of the five-year tariff reduction implementation period, or two years after this implementation period. At the same time, plans are being hatched to put very strict limitations on the number of products developing countries can apply a safeguard to - perhaps only a handful. Such limitations would be outrageous in comparison with the fact that the EU has 539 product lines that can avail of this mechanism at present, and the US 189 product lines. (See Annex 1 below.) Furthermore, informal consultations have been taking place about excluding the possibility of developing countries invoking the safeguard mechanism against other developing countries. This runs counter to the concerns of countries asking for such a mechanism, such as India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan etc. For them, any sudden import surge that might threaten rural livelihoods must be addressed, be it from a developed or developing country. In addition, developed countries wanting to avoid facing a higher safeguard tariff could easily send their exports via a developing country, if such a provision were instituted.

POLITICAL STALEMATE

However, the present stalemate is a political one. The technical work in Geneva clarifying and sharpening all aspects of the modalities is in fact still very much underway. Judging from the present talks, what is needed in Cancun will be political endorsement by Ministers on a refined version of the present draft with the most critical political decision to be made in the area of tariffs (largely between the US and EU).

Whether it is an 'ambitious' or 'less ambitious' agriculture text for the European Union and the US, the lives of ordinary people in many developing countries will be threatened. Developing countries will be called upon to reduce their tariff levels even though the issue of dumping has been side-stepped by the major powers dictating the terms of the both global trade and politics.

ANNEX 1:

38 WTO members currently have reserved the right to use a combined total of 6,072 special safeguards on agricultural products. The numbers in brackets in the table below show how many products are involved in each case, although the definition of what is a single product varies.

Table: WTO Members with the Current Right to Use Special Safeguard Measures
Australia (10); Barbados (37); Botswana (161); Bulgaria (21); Canada (150); Colombia (56); Costa Rica (87); Czech Republic (236); Ecuador (7); El Salvador (84); EU (539); Guatemala (107); Hungary (117); Iceland (462); Indonesia (13); Israel (41); Japan (121); Korea (111); Malaysia (72); Mexico (293); Morocco (374); Namibia (166); New Zealand (4); Nicaragua (21); Norway (581);

Panama (6); Philippines (118); Poland (144); Romania (175); Slovak Republic (114); South Africa (166); Swaziland (166); Switzerland-Liechtenstein (961); Thailand (52); Tunisia (32); United States (189); Uruguay (2); Venezuela (76)

Between 1995 and 1999, the seven countries that have used the Special Safeguard are EU, Japan, South Korea, Poland, United States, Hungary and Switzerland.

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THE ROAD TO CANCUN: Towards a Movement Strategy for the WTO Ministerial in Cancun

By Walden Bello*

International trade today is one of the key battlefields between pro-corporate globalization and anti-corporate globalization forces. This struggle is likely to become more intense in the next few months as the pro-globalization forces set in motion their drive to expand the powers of the World Trade Organization at the Fifth Ministerial of the WTO which will be held in Cancun, Mexico, in mid-September 2003.

As in every theater of struggle, strategy must respond to the needs of the moment. This can only be derived by identifying the strategic objective, accurately assessing the global context or conjuncture, and elaborating an effective strategy and tactical repertoire that responds to the particularities of the conjuncture.

For the movement against corporate-driven globalization, it seems fairly clear that the strategic goal must be halting or reversing WTO-mandated liberalization in trade and trade-related areas. The context or “conjuncture” is characterized by a fragile victory on the part of the free-trade globalizers at the 4th Ministerial at Doha, where they bludgeoned developing countries into agreeing to a limited round of trade talks for more liberalization on agriculture, services and industrial tariffs. The conjuncture is marked by the globalizers’ effort to build momentum so as to have the coming 5th Ministerial in Mexico launch negotiations for liberalization in the so-called trade related areas of investment, competition policy, government procurement, and trade facilitation. Their aim is to have the 5th Ministerial expand the limited set of negotiations they extracted at Doha into a comprehensive round of negotiations that would rival the Uruguay Round.

This expansion of the free trade mandate and the expansion of the power and jurisdiction of the WTO, which is now the most powerful multilateral instrument of the global corporations, is a mortal threat to development, social justice and equity, and the environment. And it is the goal that we must thwart at all costs, for we might as well kiss goodbye to sustainable development, social justice, equity, and the environment if the big trading powers and their corporate elites have their way and launch another global round for liberalization during the WTO’s 5th Ministerial Assembly in Mexico in 2003.

CAMPAIGN OBJECTIVE: DERAIL THE DRIVE FOR FREE TRADE AT THE 5TH MINISTERIAL

Given the strategic goal of stopping and reversing trade liberalization, the campaign objective on which the movement against corporate-driven globalization must focus its efforts and energies is simple and stark:

derailing the drive for free trade at the 5th Ministerial, which will serve as the key global mechanism for advancing free trade.

The free trade partisan C. Fred Bergsten, head of the Institute of International Economics (IIE), has compared free trade and the WTO to a bicycle: they collapse if they do not move forward. Which is why Seattle was such a mortal threat to the WTO and why the globalizers were so determined to extract a mandate for liberalization at Doha. Had they failed at Doha, the likely prospect was not simply a stalemate but a retreat from free trade. For the movement against corporate-driven globalization, derailing the 5th Ministerial or preventing agreement on the launching of a new comprehensive round would mean not only fighting the WTO and free trade to a standstill. It would mean creating momentum for a rollback of free trade and a reduction of the power of the WTO. This is well understood by, among others, the Economist, which warned its corporate readers “globalization is reversible.”

If derailing the drive for free trade at the 5th Ministerial is indeed the goal, then the main tactical focus of the strategy becomes clear: Consensus decision-making is the Achilles heel of the WTO, and it is the emergence of consensus that we must prevent at all costs from emerging.

In the six short months before the 5th Ministerial, the anti-corporate globalization movement must continue to focus its energy on ensuring that countries do not come into agreement in any of the areas now being negotiated or about to be negotiated, that is, agriculture, services, and industrial tariffs; and at the ministerial itself, preventing any consensus from emerging on negotiating the new issues of government procurement, competition policy, investment, and trade facilitation. The aim must be, as in Seattle, to have the delegates go to the ministerial with a “heavily bracketed” declaration—that is, one where there is no consensus on the key issues—and at the ministerial itself, to prevent consensus via last minute horse-trading. As in Seattle, the end goal must be to have the ministerial end in disagreement and lack of consensus.

As Martin Khor and others have asserted, the significance of Cancun resides mainly in the drive to extend WTO jurisdiction to the “New Issues.” Herein lies the main threat, so “winning” or “losing” in Cancun will be largely determined by whether or not we are able to stop or stalemate negotiations on the new issues. This means that the struggle will turn on whether a) our side is able to impose its definition that the Chairman’s Statement at Doha, which says that negotiations on the new issues can only be launched if there is “explicit consensus” from members, is the decisive legal document; and b) some countries can be convinced to refrain from extending consensus.

COMPONENTS OF THE STRATEGY

If the goal is unhinging the game plan for greater free trade at the 5th Ministerial, then the anti-corporate globalization movement has its work cut out for it. We must unfold a multi-pronged strategy whose components must include:

- unraveling the alliance between US Trade Representative Robert Zoellick and EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy by exacerbating the US-EU conflict on Europe’s agricultural subsidies, the Bush administration’s failure to obtain unrestricted fast-track authority to negotiate from the US Senate, Washington’s imposition of protective tariffs on steel and its resurgent trade unilateralism, and the US’ export of hormone-treated beef and genetically modified organisms (GMOs);

- instead of promoting the illusion of gaining market access for their products, consolidating the resistance of developing country governments to greater liberalization by underlining the reality that the US and the EU will never abandon the massive subsidization of their rich farming interests, the effective protection of their textile and garment sectors, and their monopolistic control of technology via the TRIPs agreement;

- intensifying our efforts to assist developing country delegations in Geneva to master the WTO process and formulate effective strategies to block the emergence of consensus on the areas prioritized by the trading powers and reassert the priority of implementation issues;

- pushing developing countries to create a block in support of the Chairman’s Statement on the new issues and explicit consensus as the key legal document, and to push countries not to extend explicit consensus;

- working with national movements, such as peasant movements for food sovereignty in the South and citizens’ movements in the North, to build massive pressure on their governments not to agree to further liberalization in agriculture, services, and other areas being negotiated;

- skillfully coordinating global protests, mass street action at the site of the ministerial, and lobby work in Geneva to create a global critical mass with momentum in the lead-up to the ministerial.

The task is immense and we have so little time. But we have no choice. The trading powers and the WTO learned from Seattle, and they brought the bicycle of the WTO back on its wheels in Doha. Likewise, we must learn from Doha so that we can wrestle the bicycle back to the ground in Mexico. And among the key lessons we need to absorb is that our coalition must have a coordinated strategy that brings our work on many different fronts, levels, and dimensions to bear on one goal: unhinging the drive for free trade at the 5th Ministerial.

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CALL FOR MOBILIZATION TOWARD THE WTO MEETING IN CANCUN 2003

Dear companeros and companeras concerned about the WTO:

Last 15 and 16 of November, we came to together in Mexico City as a broad spectrum of Mexican and international civil society organizations and held a strategy session to discuss our approaches to the upcoming 5th Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO), which will be held in Cancun, Mexico from September 10 to 14, 2003.

We were 240 people in all, from 89 Mexican and 53 foreign organizations, from 16 countries in the Americas, Europe, Asia and Africa. We agreed to send, to Mexican and international civil society, this CALL to organize and coordinate actions and information exchanges with the goal of derailing the WTO in its attempt to use Cancun to wrap up the consolidation of the current phase of the global neo-liberal model and launch a new round of negotiations on new themes.

We make this CALL considering that:

* The WTO is turning into a new “corporate” world constitution

* It is the over-arching keystone of the neo-liberal global economic architecture, which also includes regional initiatives like NAFTA, FTAA, Plan Puebla Panama, Plan Colombia, G7, CAP, APEC, etc

* The “free” trade system being imposed via the WTO is undercutting the livelihoods of peasant and family farmers, workers, indigenous peoples and those of African ancestry, women, the landless, urban dwellers, fisherfolk and the poor and middle classes worldwide

* The Cancun Ministerial will be the most important meeting to date for the WTO, because of the fundamental topics to be addressed (agriculture, intellectual property, services, investment) and the new issues being proposed, which amount to a neo-liberal and free trade vision for those sectors which are of vital importance for our economies and our sovereignties

* The worldwide movement against neo-liberal globalization has been building through meetings and protests at key points from Seattle to Prague, Gottenburg, Bangkok, Genoa, Quebec, Quito, Porto Alegre and so many others, and that in this context the upcoming WTO meeting in Cancun acquires historic proportions.

The Mexican and international organizations who participated in the November 15-16 meeting believe that the upcoming meeting of the WTO in 2003 in Cancun, Mexico, represents a key crossroads which may determine the future of the neo-liberal model, of globalization itself, and of our peoples. Therefore we CALL for the organization and coordination of information exchanges, massive public education, mobilization, and actions of protest, pressure, lobbying and repudiation, in Cancun itself, in the rest of Mexico, throughout the Americas, and around the world. Although these activities should reach a crescendo in the week of September 10-14, 2003, they should begin now, and if possible should continue after. We do not suggest a new and separate campaign on the WTO, isolated from the work that each of our organizations is already doing on related topics (NAFTA, FTAA, GMOs, Plan Puebla Panama, Plan Colombia, the war, indigenous rights, the environment, privatization, etc.). Rather, we should ADD the topic of the WTO in a very visible manner to all of the other campaigns already underway, and in each and all of our on-going struggles, in such a way that it becomes very evident to all what the relationships each other issue has with the WTO, as the over-arching keystone of the neoliberal global economic architecture.

In this process, we propose the following principles and methodologies:

* Social movements should have a central, lead role in this process

* There should be space for participation by the diverse sectors critical of, and impacted by, the WTO, including farmers and rural peoples, indigenous peoples and those of African ancestry, unions, environmentalists, anti-privatization groups, women, youth, fisherfolk, urban movements, and many others

* We see this process as part of a broad, inclusive, diverse and flexible movement, tending toward the strengthening of mechanisms of coordination between movements and other civil society groups who are critical of the WTO and the neoliberal model

* Any coordination should be operative and in the nature of exchanges on the elements mentioned above, more than a coordination to establish or impose common positions or the signing of general agreements. In no way do we propose the centralization of, or control over, the participation of organizations with respect to Cancun in 2003. Of course, this should in no way impede those who already have or wish to develop, common positions or joint activities, from moving ahead among themselves.

With this CALL we launch the open and bilingual (Spanish/English) electronic list-serve acancun-1@laneta.apc.org You may sign up for this list at:

www.laneta.apc.org/mailman/listinfo/acancun-1

We ask those who understand only one of the two languages for their patience and forbearance with messages in the other language. We ask all who can, to put their contributions in both languages.