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Climate casualties

Aspects of the devastating impact
of climate change on the South



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Editor's Note

CLIMATE change may be a global phenomenon but its adverse effects are not experienced by all countries in equal measure. While there is hardly any part of the world that can escape the effects of climate change, the fact remains that developing countries face a disproportionate share of such impacts. The countries least able to afford it have to face the brunt of the problem of climate change.

What makes this tragic state of affairs even more iniquitous is that these countries from the South were not historically responsible for the global warming that has resulted in climate change. The carbon emissions which have engendered global warming are principally the product of the process of industrialisation which the North embarked upon from the 19th century onwards. The upshot has been that countries least responsible for global warming are being disproportionately burdened with its deleterious impacts.

There was a clear recognition of this inequity when climate negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations commenced in the 1990s to tackle the problem of global warming. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which commits nations to setting internationally binding emission reduction targets, places the obligation of such reductions on industrialised nations under the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' that underlies its parent treaty, the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Unfortunately, after the detailed rules for the implementation of the Protocol were adopted at the 2001 UN climate conference in Marrakesh, the rich countries sought to whittle away the import of this key provision at subsequent climate conferences. Arguing that all countries should be obliged to undertake binding emission reductions, they intensified their campaign with the approach of 2012, the end of the first commitment period of the Protocol. All these attempts only served to frustrate a meaningful agreement to tackle the worsening climate crisis in the post-2012 period.

By the time a climate change accord was concluded in Paris last year, the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' was successfully defended by developing countries. Nevertheless, under the Paris Agreement, all nations are required to stipulate their contributions to reducing carbon emissions (dubbed nationally determined contributions or NDCs). The result is that developing countries, which had hitherto been exempted under the Kyoto Protocol from undertaking such contributions, had now to commit themselves to specific emission cuts albeit in a nationally determined way and with implementation support from developed countries. Having pushed some of the burden of the cuts onto the poor countries, the rich countries were now loathe to demonstrate any 'ambition' to realise the level of emission reductions they were morally obliged to undertake, given their culpability for the climate crisis. The result was a deeply flawed agreement that was inadequate to meet the challenge of keeping climate change in check.

With developing countries facing the brunt of the climate crisis, it is clearly incumbent on the rich countries to also provide the finance and technology to assist them to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. In fact, this is what they are obliged to do under the 1992 Convention and, most recently, the Paris Agreement. Unfortunately, at every UN climate conference, the rich countries have sought to minimise their commitments on this vital question. The refusal of the rich countries to loosen their purse-strings for what is an existential problem to many developing countries is a reflection of their lack of commitment to addressing arguably the most serious crisis of our times.

As a result, vulnerable developing countries have been left with precious little to face the ravages of climate change. With rising sea levels, floods, coastal erosion and desertification, the very existence of some small nations is at risk. But even where their physical existence is not in jeopardy, temperature changes threaten the food and water supply of many vulnerable developing countries. In a word, climate change is threatening agriculture and food security in many of the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The threats are a clear and present danger. And they have taken on a new urgency in the light of claims by a former senior NASA climate scientist that global temperatures have increased to a level not seen since the interglacial Eemian period 115,000 years ago. James Hansen and 11 other experts have claimed in a recent paper that given the prevailing rate of increase, the goal aspired to under the Paris Agreement, of limiting average temperature rise to 1.5°C, will be impossible to achieve with current technologies. One can only hope that this prognosis is incorrect, but it does underscore the need for urgent action.

In our cover story, we highlight some aspects of the adverse impacts of climate change on developing countries. After an introductory article which provides an overview of the specifics of the climate change threat, with particular reference to Africa, we turn the spotlight on Latin America and the Caribbean. Extracts from an informative report on the impact of climate change on agriculture and food security in the region illuminate the threats facing this continent.

An article on the plight of the Bangladeshi capital Dhaka threatened by inundation and one on the Kerkennah islands in Tunisia provide national case studies of the problem. Another piece on the US Gulf Coast encapsulates the plight of 'the South in the North', i.e., communities of low-wealth black and brown people who are impacted 'first and worst' by climate change impacts. We conclude with a provocative critique of the South Asian literary community's penchant for ignoring the damage caused to the poor and marginalised by climate change.

— The Editors

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Towards a global shift to agroecology

A report by an international panel of experts has highlighted the serious problems associated with the current food and agricultural system (often referred to as industrial agriculture) and has called for a shift to more diversified agroecological systems. *Clare Westwood* looks into the report released in June this year.

TODAY's food and farming systems have succeeded in supplying large volumes of foods to global markets, but are generating negative outcomes on multiple fronts: widespread degradation of land, water and ecosystems; high greenhouse gas emissions; biodiversity losses; persistent hunger and micronutrient deficiencies alongside the rapid rise of obesity and diet-related diseases; and livelihood stresses for farmers around the world. Ironically, small-scale farming communities make up about 50%¹ of the world's 795 million hungry.² Modern agriculture is clearly failing to sustain the people and resources on which it relies and has come to represent an existential threat to itself.

Many influential studies have helped shape our understanding of the perilous situation our food systems are in. However, few studies have provided a comprehensive view of how alternative food systems, based around fundamentally different agricultural models, perform against the same criteria, while fewer still have mapped out the pathways of transition towards the sustainable food systems of the future.

The International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems (IPES-Food) has sought to fill this gap. IPES-Food is an independent panel working to inform the debate on how to reform food systems. Launched in 2015, the Panel comprises environmental scientists, development economists, nutritionists, agronomists and sociologists as well as experienced practitioners from civil society and social movements. In June 2016, IPES-Food released its first major report, entitled 'From Uniformity to Diversity: A paradigm shift



Diversified agroecological systems have huge potential to improve on the outcomes of industrial agriculture.

from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems'.³ This article summarises the main points of the report.

The report highlights how many of the problems of today's food and agricultural systems are linked specifically to 'industrial agriculture', specifically, the input-intensive crop monocultures and industrial-scale feedlots that currently dominate farming landscapes. The uniformity at the heart of these systems and their reliance on chemical fertilisers, pesticides and the preventive use of antibiotics have systematically led to negative outcomes and vulnerabilities. The report therefore calls for a shift towards diversifying agriculture and reorienting it around ecological practices.

Specialised industrial agriculture and diversified agroecological farming stand at two ends of a wide spectrum. The report examines the outcomes of both industrial agriculture and diversified agroecological systems. It asks what the impacts on food systems would be if diversity, rather than uniformity, was the key imperative. Based on a review of the latest

evidence, the report identifies the potential for diversified agroecological systems to succeed where current systems are failing, namely in reconciling concerns such as food security, environmental protection, nutritional adequacy and social equity.

Making the case for changing course is crucial, but so too is mapping out a pathway of transition. Although the foundations of this transition are already being laid by farmers, consumers, civil society groups and many others, the current industrial agriculture model is locked in place by a series of powerful feedback loops extending well beyond the world of farming. Farmers cannot simply be expected to rethink their production model nor consumers to radically reorient their purchasing patterns without a major shift in the incentives running through food systems.

Industrial agriculture

Olivier De Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food from 2008-14 and Co-chair of IPES-Food, states:⁴ 'Many of the problems

in food systems are linked specifically to the uniformity at the heart of industrial agriculture, and its reliance on chemical fertilisers and pesticides. The solution is to diversify agriculture and reorient it around ecological practices, whether the starting point is highly-industrialised agriculture or subsistence farming in the world's poorest countries. It is not a lack of evidence holding back the agroecological alternative. It is the mismatch between its huge potential to improve outcomes across food systems, and its much smaller potential to generate profits for agribusiness firms.'

Some of the key systemic outcomes of industrial agriculture are listed in the IPES-Food report as follows:

- Stagnated or collapsed yields in 24-39% of the world's maize, rice, wheat and soybean production zones over recent decades.
- Increased pest resistance and disease vulnerability, largely due to massive pesticide usage.
- Degradation of 20% of global land.
- Contributor of the 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions arising from food and farming.
- Severe water contamination and over-usage due to the excessive application of fertilisers and pesticides in crop monocultures, and the waste generated by industrial animal feedlots.
- Biodiversity loss threatening the 35% of global crops dependent on pollination and erosion of the genetic pool.
- High production costs which are unviable for many small-scale farmers.
- Trade and export orientation expose economies to price shocks and 'commodity-induced poverty traps'.
- Hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition due to the focus on energy-rich, nutrient-poor staple crop varieties.
- Health problems due to pesticide exposure, like Alzheimer's disease, birth defects, cancers and developmental disorders. The preventive use of antibiotics in industrial animal production systems has exacerbated the problem of bacterial resistance to an-

tibiotics.

The negative impacts of these systems are multiple and mutually reinforcing. Industrial agriculture's weaknesses are its core characteristics, i.e., the principles of specialisation and uniformity around which it is organised, and the reliance on chemical inputs as a means of managing agro-ecosystems.

The report makes clear that industrial agriculture does not and cannot reconcile the multiple concerns of sustainable food systems. Food and farming systems can be reformed, but only by moving away from an industrial orientation and organisation. A fundamental reorientation of agriculture, particularly in its relationship with ecosystems, is required in order to break these cycles.

The outcomes above are further mediated by a range of factors extending well beyond the realm of agriculture. Identifying the power imbalances and how they lock industrial agriculture in place is crucial. Industrial food systems have in fact taken shape around industrial agriculture, creating a set of feedback loops ('lock-ins') that serve to reinforce this mode of farming. These lock-ins are identified in the report as follows:

- Path dependency – Industrial agriculture requires significant upfront investments, in terms of equipment, training, networks and retail relationships, and often requires farmers to scale up. Once these investments and structural shifts have been made, it is increasingly difficult for farmers to change course.
- Export orientation – Specific supply chains (e.g., for animal feed and processed food ingredients) have become increasingly export-oriented and export-dependent, with accompanying risks and problems like price volatility, environmental degradation and competition for land.
- The expectation of cheap food – Industrial agriculture and shifting consumer habits have helped facilitate the emergence of mass food retailing, characterised by the abundance of relatively cheap, uniform, highly processed foods and year-round availability of a wide variety of foods. This

pushes farmers to industrialise their production.

- Compartmentalised thinking – Green Revolution thinking remains dominant today. Highly compartmentalised structures continue to govern the setting of priorities in politics, education, research and business, allowing the solutions offered by industrial agriculture to remain at centre stage.
- Short-term thinking – Key players in food systems are often required to deliver short-term results, e.g., retailers are bound by consumer expectations for year-round availability of a variety of foods at low prices. These conditions are not conducive to fundamental shifts in production requiring a transitional period in order to bear fruit.
- 'Feed the world' narratives – Such narratives predispose us to approach the question in terms of global production volumes of mainly energy-rich, nutrition-poor crop commodities. Thus, industrial agriculture continues to be seen as the solution while several key issues like social equity are sidelined.
- Measures of success – Narrowly defined indicators of agricultural performance, e.g., yields, tend to favour large-scale industrial monocultures and fail to capture many of the benefits of diversified systems, including resilience to shocks and reduced health risks.
- Concentration of power – The way food systems are currently structured allows value to accrue mainly to a limited number of actors, reinforcing their economic and political dominance, and thus their ability to influence the governance of those systems.

Diversified agroecological systems

Agroecology is a universal logic for redesigning agricultural systems in ways that maximise biodiversity and stimulate interactions between different plants and species as part of holistic strategies to build long-term

fertility, healthy agro-ecosystems and secure livelihoods. It is a broad landing space that can be reached via a variety of pathways and entry points, progressively or in more rapid shifts, as farmers free themselves from the structures of industrial agriculture and refocus their farming systems around a new set of principles.

The report finds that diversified agroecological systems have huge potential to improve on the outcomes of industrial agriculture. Data show that these systems can compete with industrial agriculture in terms of total outputs, conferring resilience in the face of environmental stresses and delivering production increases. Diversified agroecological systems can also pave the way for diverse diets and improved health. The evidence in regard to the environmental benefits of these systems is overwhelming, from increases in wild biodiversity to the improvement of soil health and fertility and water retention. In particular, the capacity of diversified agroecological systems to restore degraded land and to keep carbon in the ground is unmatched by any other options on the table.

Some of the key findings are:

- A 30-year study shows that average organic yields are generally equivalent to conventional agriculture, and 30% higher in drought years.
- Total outputs in diversified grassland systems are 15-79% higher than in monocultures.
- Resource efficiency is 2-4 times higher on small-scale agroecological farms.
- 15% more biodiversity has been found in diversified agriculture and 30% more wild species on organic farms.
- Organic meat and milk provide around 50% more beneficial omega-3 fatty acids than their conventional equivalents.

It is the reintegration of agriculture with healthy ecosystems and sustainable land management that holds the key to a range of other positive outcomes, from strong and stable outputs to secure farm livelihoods. Where diversified systems raise productivity, they do so durably, and in the places where additional food is desperately needed. Diversified sys-

tems produce diverse and changing outputs. These systems have, however, not yet been adopted widely enough to show their full impacts, nor have they been able to benefit from significant investments and an enabling environment in which to fulfil their full potential.

Conclusions and recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the evidence gathered, IPES-Food concludes that there may be no greater risk than sticking with industrial agriculture and the systemic problems it generates. The strategy is riskier the longer it continues. Industrial agriculture and the 'industrial food systems' that have developed around it are locked in place by a series of vicious cycles.

Tweaking practices can improve some of the specific outcomes of industrial agriculture, but will not provide long-term solutions to the multiple problems it generates. The key is to establish political priorities, namely, to support the emergence of alternative systems which are based around fundamentally different logics, and which, over time, generate different and more equitable power relations. Incremental change must not be allowed to divert political attention and political capital away from the more fundamental shift that is urgently needed, and can now be delivered, through a paradigm shift from industrial agriculture to diversified agroecological systems.

There is growing evidence that these systems keep carbon in the ground, support biodiversity, rebuild soil fertility and sustain yields over time, providing a basis for secure farm livelihoods. Although a shift to diversified agroecological systems is not without challenges, it is likely to be the only way to set food systems on a sustainable footing. A key insight is recognising the discrepancy between the potential of diversified agroecological systems to deliver what really matters and our capacity to measure and value those things.

Change is already happening.

Industrial food systems are being challenged on multiple fronts, from new forms of cooperation and knowledge creation to the development of new market relationships that bypass conventional retail circuits.

Recommendations

The report cites seven recommendations to turn the lock-ins of the industrial agriculture system into entry points for change to agroecological systems. These steps must shift the centre of gravity in food systems, allowing harmful dependencies to be cut, the agents of change to be empowered, and alliances to be forged in favour of change. They are listed below.

- Develop new indicators for sustainable food systems.
- Shift public support towards diversified agroecological production systems.
- Support short supply chains and alternative retail infrastructures.
- Use public procurement to support local agroecological produce.
- Strengthen movements that unify diverse constituencies around agroecology.
- Mainstream agroecology and holistic food systems approaches into education and research agendas.
- Develop food planning processes and 'joined-up food policies' at multiple levels. ♦

Clare Westwood is a researcher on food and agriculture issues with the Third World Network.

Endnotes

- 1 World Food Programme (2015). Who are the hungry?
- 2 FAO, IFAD and WFP (2015). State of Food Insecurity in the World – SOFI – In Brief.
- 3 http://www.ipes-food.org/images/Reports/UniformityToDiversity_FullReport.pdf
- 4 How to Leave Industrial Agriculture Behind: Food Systems Experts Urge Global Shift Towards Agroecology. <http://www.ipes-food.org/how-to-leave-industrial-agriculture-behind-food-systems-experts-urge-global-shift-towards-agroecology>

UN panel backs moves by developing countries to protect access to medicines

A high-level UN panel has put its weight behind developing and poorest countries and their right to ensure access of their populations to affordable and accessible medicines and health technologies by fully using the flexibilities in the World Trade Organisation (WTO)'s Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement.

D Ravi Kanth

THE United Nations High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines (UNHLP) has asked developing and poorest countries not to succumb to political and economic pressure from major industrialised countries and their powerful pharmaceutical companies to refrain from implementing the flexibilities provided in the TRIPS Agreement, particularly the use of compulsory licensing provisions and the freedom to determine patentability criteria based on 'genuine innovation'.

In a path-breaking report submitted recently to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the Panel reminded the developing and poorest countries that they must strive to introduce and implement 'public health-sensitive intellectual property rules and mechanisms' so as to strike a credible balance in 'the misalignment between profit-driven innovation models and public health priorities'.

The Panel repeatedly emphasised existing TRIPS flexibilities, which include 'the freedom to determine patentability criteria' and further define concepts such as 'novelty', 'inventive step' and 'industrial capacity' to ensure that patents are only awarded for 'genuine innovation'.

In addition, the ability to determine the terms for issuing compulsory licences, according to the Panel, 'allows governments to fulfil their human rights obligations by securing



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A high-level UN panel has called on WTO member states to make full use of the flexibilities in the WTO's intellectual property rules to promote access to medicines.

the availability and affordability of health technologies'.

Undue pressure

The Panel expressed concern that undue 'political and economic pressure placed on governments [in the developing and the poorest countries] to forego the use of TRIPS flexibilities violates the integrity and legitimacy of the system of legal rights and duties created by the TRIPS Agreement, as reaffirmed by the Doha Declaration [on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health]'.

The Panel said that pressure by the major industrialised countries on developing and poorest countries to forego TRIPS flexibilities 'under-

mines the efforts of states to meet their human rights and public health obligations'.

The unprecedented pressure exerted on countries like South Africa, Thailand, India and Brazil not to invoke compulsory licence provisions in the TRIPS Agreement is well documented.

There are several studies and reports that the United States on behalf of its powerful pharmaceutical giants such as Pfizer, Merck and Bristol-Myers Squibb; Switzerland on behalf of Novartis and Roche among others; and the United Kingdom on behalf of GlaxoSmithKline among others, have exerted such pressures.

The world's leading pharmaceutical giants treat the use of compul-

sory licences to address grave public health challenges as a weapon of mass destruction, according to analysts familiar with the arm-twisting and coercive tactics deployed by governments of major industrialised countries.

Against this backdrop, the Panel exposed the lie that pharmaceutical research and development (R&D) is mostly funded by private companies. The Panel suggests that much of the funding for R&D is provided by public sources. 'Public funding agencies should strongly encourage patenting and licensing practices that benefit public health, including the use of non-exclusive licences, the donation of intellectual property rights, participation in public sector patent pools and other mechanisms that maximise innovation while promoting access,' the Panel recommended.

Over the course of the UNHLP's proceedings that began last year, powerful US industry and business lobbies had launched a campaign to undermine its work. In a letter addressed to Senator Orrin Hatch, the chair of the US Senate Committee on Finance, in February, six leading American industry and business lobbies demanded an 'effective inter-agency approach' – such as was adopted by the US delegation in the Paris UN climate talks last December – to other UN initiatives, particularly the UNHLP.

The six American lobbies that mounted pressure on the US Congress were the Biotechnology Innovation Organisation (BIO), National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), National Foreign Trade Council (NFTC), Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), US Chamber of Commerce, and US Council for International Business (USCIB).

They cited the 'effective inter-agency approach' under the leadership of the US State Department to 'secure a final UNFCCC [UN Framework Convention on Climate Change] text [in Paris] that does not mention IP [intellectual property] and thus removes uncertainty that could have discouraged continued investments by US companies in clean technolo-



A briefing session convened by the UN High-Level Panel on Access to Medicines.

gy'.

The pharma and business lobbies mounted pressure on the US Senate, maintaining that IP protection is facing many challenges, particularly from the UNHLP.

Challenging mandate

The UNHLP was established by the UN Secretary-General to 'remedy the policy incoherence between justifiable rights of inventors, international human rights law, trade rules and public health in the context of health technologies'. Faced with an ever-expanding disease burden because of new pathogens and epidemics all over the world, particularly in developing and poorest countries, the UNHLP embarked on a challenging project to help remove the distortions caused by monopoly patent provisions and burdensome IP rules.

The Panel is co-chaired by former Swiss President Ruth Dreifuss and former President of Botswana Festus Gontebanye Mogae. Dreifuss is respected all over the world for her sustained campaign against pharmaceutical giant Novartis, which refused to accept India's compulsory licence for the Glivec cancer drug issued on public health grounds. Mogae provided leadership in tackling the HIV problem by ensuring antiretroviral treatment to the citizens of Botswana.

Other members of the Panel include Andrew Witty, former chief executive officer of GlaxoSmith-Kline; Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, a development economist; Awn Al-Khasawneh, former prime minister of Jordan; Celso Amorim, former foreign minister of Brazil; Winnie Byanyima, executive director of Oxfam; Shiba Phurailatpam, an HIV patient and treatment activist; Malebona Precious Matsoso, director-general of the South African National Health Department; Yusuf Hamied, executive chairman of leading generic drug company Cipla; Michael Kirby, a retired Australian judge; Ruth Okediji, a law professor at Minnesota University Law School; Jorge Bermudez, former head of UNITAID; Kinga Goncz, a law professor from Hungary; Maria C Freire, executive director of the US Foundation for the National Institutes of Health; and Stephen Lewis, an official of the advocacy organisation AIDS-Free World.

In its 70-page report, the Panel touched on several issues such as 'new incentives for research and development of health technologies' based on identifying 'global health priorities' for distributing scarce health resources; and 'governance, accountability and transparency' mechanisms to address the incoherence between human rights, trade, intellectual property and public

health.

The Panel's major recommendations cover 'intellectual property laws and access to health technologies', in which it urged WTO member states to 'commit themselves, at the highest political levels, to respect the letter and the spirit of the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and Public Health', and to refrain from any action that will limit their implementation and use in order to promote access to health technologies.

Specific policy guidelines suggested by the Panel include:

(a) WTO members must make full use of the TRIPS Agreement flexibilities as confirmed by the Doha Declaration to promote access to health technologies when necessary.

(b) WTO members should make full use of policy space available in Article 27 of the TRIPS Agreement by adopting and applying rigorous definitions of invention and patentability that are in the best interests of the public health of the country and its inhabitants.

(c) Governments should adopt and implement legislation that facilitates the issuance of compulsory licences for legitimate public health needs, particularly with regard to essential medicines.

(d) WTO members should revise the paragraph 6 decision in order to find a solution that enables a swift and expedient export of pharmaceutical products produced under compulsory licence.

(e) Governments and the private sector must refrain from explicit or implicit threats, tactics or strategies that undermine the right of WTO members to use TRIPS flexibilities.

(f) Instances of undue political and commercial pressure should be reported by the WTO secretariat during the Trade Policy Review of members. Further, punitive measures must be taken against countries exerting undue political and economic pressure.

(g) Public-funded research in the pharmaceutical sector must ensure that knowledge generated from such research must be made freely available.



Pharmaceutical research in a laboratory. The UN High-Level Panel has recommended that governments provide new incentives for research of health technologies by increasing their current levels of investment to address unmet needs.

(h) Governments must provide new incentives for research of health technologies by increasing their current levels of investment in health technology innovation to address unmet needs.

(i) Governments must review access to health technologies in the respective countries in light of human rights principles and states' obligations to fulfil them.

(j) The UN Secretary-General should establish an independent review body tasked with assessing progress on health technology innovation and access under the ambit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(k) Biomedical private sector companies involved in health technology innovation and access should report, as part of their annual reporting cycle, on actions they have taken that promote access to health technologies.

(l) 'Governments should require manufacturers and distributors of health technologies to disclose to drug regulatory and procurement authorities information pertaining to: (i) the costs of R&D, production, marketing and distribution of health technology being procured or given marketing approval with each expense category separated; and (ii) any public funding received in the development of the

health technology...'

(m) Governments should require that the unidentified data on all completed and discontinued clinical trials be made publicly available in an easily searchable public register established and operated by existing mechanisms such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) Clinical Trials Registry Platform.

(n) Governments should establish and maintain publicly accessible databases with patent information status and data on medicines and vaccines.

The credible recommendations set out in the Panel report can only be implemented if the major pharmaceutical companies and their home governments do not resort to predatory practices, including mud-slinging and smear campaigns, according to analysts familiar with the recommendations.

'It is a ringing endorsement of TRIPS flexibilities from the report and now the public debate must force the governments to implement the recommendations,' said an analyst who asked not to be quoted. ♦

D Ravi Kanth writes for the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS) published by the Third World Network. This article is reproduced from SUNS (No. 8313, 16 September 2016).

The social geography of Zika in Brazil

Brazil's Zika epidemic has placed new and added pressure on the country's public health system, but much about the outbreak is very old.

**Jeffrey Lesser and
Uriel Kitron**

THERE is a saying in Brazil: 'Mosquitoes are democratic; they bite the rich and the poor alike.' While the insects do not have a highly developed sense of class consciousness, the current Zika virus crisis – like previous epidemics of mosquito-borne diseases, from yellow fever to malaria to dengue – has had differential impacts across social, class and gender lines. In other words, Zika is yet another indicator of the inequality that persists in contemporary Brazil, even after several decades of democracy.

Mosquito-borne illnesses disproportionately affect the less privileged majority of Brazil's population, and they do so in a variety of ways. The current crisis demonstrates disparity not only in terms of class per se, but via a variety of other issues that connect with class.

The Zika virus has had a larger impact in the north of Brazil, including the states of Bahia, Pernambuco and Rio Grande do Norte, where a higher percentage of the general population are poor and climatic conditions are more favourable to the spread of mosquito-borne viruses than in the wealthier and less tropical south (i.e., the states of São Paulo, Paraná and Rio Grande do Sul).

Ethical issues related to the Zika virus have also had differential impacts, and those who can only afford to use the Brazilian national public health system, the Sistema Único de Saúde (Unified Health System), are faced with very different reproductive choices from those who use the country's private healthcare system. In some extreme cases, wealthy women simply leave Brazil during pregnan-



A paediatrician at a hospital in the northeastern Brazilian city of Recife examining a baby born with microcephaly, a condition believed to be linked with Zika infection of pregnant mothers. In Brazil, the Zika virus has had a larger impact in the north of the country, where a higher percentage of the population are poor and climatic conditions are more favourable to the spread of mosquito-borne viruses.

cy since abortion in the country is legal only if the pregnancy puts the life of the mother at risk or is the result of rape.

As with all reproductive issues, gender plays a major role in determining impacts and responsibilities, and the current discourse surrounding Zika in Brazil is highly targeted towards women. Health officials, for example, have recommended that women in at-risk areas avoid getting pregnant and avoid sexual intercourse but have largely ignored the role of men in transmission.

Ethical issues related to science have also arisen in the context of the Zika scare, most notably questions about the proper use of chemicals for indoor house spraying and issues surrounding the potential dangers of developing genetically modified mosquitoes capable of halting the transmission of the virus.

Class and ethical disparities related to health issues generally, and

mosquito-borne illnesses specifically, are neither new nor are they Brazil-specific. The history of the introduction of new diseases has long illustrated this point. Diseases have been on the move for ages: the bubonic plague 'invaded' Europe from Asia; smallpox, measles, yellow fever, malaria, cholera and dengue came from the 'Old World' to the 'New World', and syphilis went in the other direction. Taken together, it is clear that Native Americans got the raw end of the deal, and the results were devastating. It is estimated that between 1492 and 1595, nearly one million people in the Americas died of smallpox, measles, mumps and other 'European' diseases. Some believe that between 90% and 95% of the New World's native population died due to Old World diseases. Smallpox and measles were the main culprits, responsible for killing most of the native inhabitants of the Americas. Mosquitoes and mosquito-borne diseases

were particularly noteworthy for their invasion of the Americas during ‘the age of discovery’, when imperialism and the linked slave trade led to the global circulation of many new diseases.

For yellow fever to spread in the Americas, a new mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*, had to be introduced. The most likely explanation is that this occurred via the sailing ships that transported enslaved Africans to the Americas. This particular mosquito found fertile ground in the growing urban centres of the Americas, from Brazil to the United States. *Aedes aegypti* is particularly well adapted to the urban environment where a high concentration of humans and a plethora of breeding sites exist. Adult mosquitoes adapted to residential spaces, and the aquatic larvae found homes in artificial water containers regularly found in households, such as water tanks, buckets and tyres.

Population increase and the growing density of cities – according to the World Bank, only 20% of the Brazilian population lived in cities in 1900, with that number growing to 30% in 1940, 55% in 1970 and to more than 80% in 2010 – cleared the path for the introduction of other viruses that are transmitted by this mosquito vector. More than a century ago, dengue fever and its four serotypes arrived, and starting in 2013, the Chikungunya and Zika viruses joined them in the Americas.

Zika virus, which is transmitted primarily by *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, was initially identified in monkeys in the Ugandan Zika forest in 1947, and large human outbreaks were first reported in Micronesia in 2007 and French Polynesia in 2013. In 2014, cases with a characteristic rash were found in several municipalities in northeastern Brazil. By April 2015, the virus had spread to Bahia and Rio Grande do Norte. In Salvador, the capital of the state of Bahia, almost 15,000 such cases were reported by physicians between February and June 2015 – most of them associated with Zika. By the end of 2015, cases had been identified in all five regions of the country, with the Bra-

zilian Ministry of Health estimating that between 500,000 and 1.5 million people had been infected. From Brazil, the virus has migrated to other parts of the Americas, with notable outbreaks in Central America, the Caribbean and tropical portions of the Andean region.

While the clinical manifestations of Zika are considered mostly mild and self-limiting, the 2015 outbreak was associated first with an increase in the incidence of a serious neurological condition, Guillain-Barré syndrome. In late 2015, an increase in microcephaly was observed in newborns in northeastern Brazil, and a link to prior infection of the mothers with Zika was suspected. Global attention to the Zika virus as a major public health threat to pregnant women and their newborns followed, and both the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation (WHO) soon declared a public health emergency.

The Zika virus – and the state response to it – are part of a larger everyday context in which poorer people relate to the Brazilian state in ways different than those hailing from the more socioeconomically privileged classes. For example, killings of citizens by Brazil’s military police take place overwhelmingly in poor neighbourhoods, and the victims are much more likely to be male and darker-skinned. In the area of health, policies were (and are) created by members of Brazil’s dominant classes – scientists, physicians and politicians – whose approaches, though often well-intentioned, may be regarded by the population at large as paternalistic or as part of a broader system of social control and inequity.

Such sentiments have a long history. In the late 19th century, members of the elite classes refused to follow yellow fever isolation laws – at the time public health officials believed the disease was contagious by contact – if it meant being housed with patients from the country’s popular classes. Since the government would not use the same force against privileged Brazilians that it used to compel the poor to follow the law, a

separate yellow fever isolation mansion, complete with roof tiles from France, marble stairs from Italy and special rooms for servants to live with their employers, was constructed on the grounds of the São Paulo ‘Isolation Hospital’. Seemingly straightforward public health challenges – for example, how best to contain mosquitoes and the diseases that they cause – thus cannot be divorced from histories that have long made the general public suspicious of the state and its agents.

Negative popular reaction to national health policy has been present since the establishment of the Brazilian Republic in 1889, which followed more than 75 years as an empire and centuries as a colony of Portugal. During the first years of the 20th century, Brazilian President Rodrigues Alves instituted a set of urban reforms in the capital city of Rio de Janeiro, which included the demolition of older structures and tenements. In their place, more upscale buildings were erected, and the displacement of the city’s poor population followed – a phenomenon that continues in Brazil, as it does in many other countries. As part of this plan, the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation – known in Brazil as Fiocruz – took on new importance through its partnership with what is today the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

Under the leadership of its founder and namesake, the epidemiologist and public health leader Oswaldo Cruz, Fiocruz undertook the mission of addressing public health challenges at a time when many educated Brazilians believed the poorer and African-descended sectors of the population were ‘naturally’ weaker and more susceptible to health ailments than the country’s European-descended elite. Using what at the time were widely accepted ‘scientific’ methods (think phrenology and eugenics), scholars, physicians and scientists concluded that many in the population were ‘degenerate’. This is a word found consistently in medical and health studies prior to 1945, and one that continues to be used in everyday language about the poor. To-

day, Fiocruz has ministry-level responsibilities, including what in the United States would fall under the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and the university-based public health school training programme.

In 1904, Cruz received federal authorisation to make wide-ranging sanitary improvements in Brazil, including the creation of the ‘Mosquito-Killing Brigades’. Beginning with this programme, sanitary workers were given the legal authority to enter the private homes of Brazilians to exterminate mosquitoes that transmitted yellow fever, as well as rats that transmitted bubonic plague.

Not surprisingly, the public reaction to the ‘Mosquito-Killing Brigades’ was mixed. Members of the elite generally welcomed a project that they saw as resolving the national problems of ‘degenerate’ culture, labour and health linked to slavery and the size of the country’s African-descended citizenry. (In 1888, Brazil became the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery.) The most economically marginalised parts of the Brazilian population, on the other hand, often viewed the sanitation workers more as agents of state-directed social control than as individuals who prioritised their community’s health and well-being – particularly when such officials conducted their work alongside armed police escorts. Indeed, the term ‘health worker’ is a relatively new one in the country; up until the mid-20th century one official designation of such persons was ‘hygiene police’.

The frustration with state-driven health policies – at times well-intentioned and at other moments less so – led in 1904 to what is remembered today as the ‘Revolt Against the Vaccine’. This week-long uprising in Rio de Janeiro followed congressional approval of Cruz’s proposal for a mandatory vaccination law that gave health workers, accompanied by the police, the right to enter the homes of Rio de Janeiro’s residents to apply a smallpox vaccine, by force if necessary. A civil war between authorities and the population ensued, leaving 30

people dead and hundreds more wounded or imprisoned. Given that a well-known characterisation of early 20th-century state-citizen relations was that ‘the social question was a matter for the police’, it is not a surprise to find that the reverence with which Oswaldo Cruz and his foundation are held today, at least among Brazil’s elite, did not extend to all sectors of the population.

For many scholars of Brazilian culture, aspects of the social conflicts that led to the ‘Revolt Against the Vaccine’ can be found in the contemporary crisis involving mosquito-borne diseases such as Chikungunya, dengue and especially Zika. Most of the population appears to accept – and may even welcome – state-driven eradication and control measures, since regular home visits by vector-control agents may create positive relations between them and the populations that they serve. Yet, when the Brazilian military, with its slogan ‘strong arm, friendly hand’, was tasked in February 2016 with conducting mosquito eradication visits and sending uniformed physicians to the public health clinics that the wealthier classes do not use for everyday care, other issues arose. Some commentators wondered how residents might feel given the numerous civilian deaths that have occurred during the ‘pacification’ of poor neighbourhoods by the police and military. Others asked whether soldiers would be sent into residential buildings in elite neighbourhoods under any circumstances. There were even reports that the military high command did not authorise entry into neighbourhoods that they deemed ‘too dangerous’ for uniformed soldiers – that is to say, neighbourhoods that military officials believed to be controlled by particular criminal organisations.

In the huge metropolis of São Paulo, as in most large cities, mosquito-borne diseases affect neighbourhoods in very different ways. These variations are in large part a function of the availability of breeding sites and opportunities for mosquito-human encounters, which in

turn depend on the density of people and of insects. Housing quality, water and sanitary services, temperature (e.g., urban heat island effect), prior exposure and other factors help determine the probability of transmission and disease rates. Cultural and political assumptions about class, gender and race influence both budget and policy decisions.

Health notices featuring larger-than-life images of mosquitoes have become a regular part of the contemporary Brazilian visual landscape. While some imagery provides a realistic view of the threat, much of the poster campaign portrays mosquitoes as monsters with fangs, a holdover from the early 20th-century images used by the government in its education materials. This approach, some contemporary public health officials complain, may lead the public to view any flying insect, rather than the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito specifically, as an imminent danger.

The ‘mosquitoes as monsters’ posters are part of a larger context in which poorer neighbourhoods and their residents shoulder an uneven burden of disease for three important reasons. First, these spaces tend to have higher concentrations of people living in close proximity to one another. This is the case not just in the poorest *comunidades* (what used to be known as ‘favelas’) but also in working-class neighbourhoods. Second, health policy-makers and those officials in charge of enforcement are today, like a century ago, from sectors of society whose relations with poorer people may be a reflection of the extremes that have been characteristic of Brazilian society for decades.

Finally, disease concentration in marginalised districts is related to irregular and unpredictable water distribution since pressure diminishes the farther away one lives from central water distribution points, which are often located far from urban peripheries. This general situation is exacerbated by droughts like the one that affected the cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in 2015.

In less privileged neighbour-

hoods, therefore, individual families use water tanks – round plastic containers about a metre in diameter – for storage of both drinking and bathing water. These tanks get filled on the days when the neighbourhood receives water, which in poorer parts of the city may be only two or three times a week, and not necessarily at the same time each week. When not properly capped or in a state of disrepair, water tanks can become highly productive sites for mosquito larvae. Affluent neighbourhoods, on the other hand – especially those with tall apartment buildings – receive water regularly, and large, building-owned tanks are maintained by building employees rather than by individual families.

All three issues are evident in our Emory University and Brazilian government-funded interdisciplinary research project that combines historical, anthropological and epidemiological methods to examine disease over the course of a century in the city of São Paulo. In March 2016, we went with public health officials to the working-class neighbourhood of Capão Redondo, a district of 275,000 people within the larger, and perhaps ironically named, sub-prefecture of Campo Limpo (literally, ‘clean field’). According to the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (the federal agency responsible for the census in Brazil), the average income in Capão Redondo is about 2.5 minimum salaries (\$600 at current exchange rates), with more than 50% making less than five minimum salaries per month and an additional 30% with no income other than state benefits.

The density of residential construction is striking in Capão Redondo. Most structures contain between six and eight households living in two or three rooms each. In other words, homes that in wealthy neighbourhoods would have separate bedrooms, a family room, a dining room and a kitchen are, in poorer areas, compressed into much smaller spaces serving multiple functions. Each family has its own water tank, which is filled via the city water authority system on the unpredictable days when

water pressure is high enough. Furthermore, living structures are constantly under construction, or the hope of construction. In practice, this means that buildings rarely have finished roofs, but instead have top floors with materials that might be used for future creation of new floors, and thus rooms for more families.

We entered multiple structures with health officials, whose goal it was to educate the public about methods of mosquito control and to look for breeding sites. While many problems were easy to resolve by simply overturning containers with water, other sites were more challenging. Trash collection, for instance, is not regular in many poor neighbourhoods in Brazil, and items ranging from plastic sheets to disposed containers quickly become potential breeding sites following heavy rains. The unfinished top floors of structures are often filled with large and heavy material that cannot be easily covered or overturned.

Water tanks are also a potential source of trouble. While many individual families have relatively modern tanks made of durable, high-impact plastic (and sometimes aluminium), some families possess older tanks with cracked or broken tops, creating a prime site for mosquito breeding. While far from a scientific sample, during a single day in Capão Redondo, each of the approximately 10 buildings that we visited had at least one tank with a broken top where the sanitation workers found larvae, creating a potential risk for all the families sharing the same structure.

Because there is no national standard for water tanks in Brazil, some common design issues also create problems. For example, tanks use a float ball (like those found in many US-style toilets) to stop water flowing when the tank is filled. Since the float balls can stop working, all tanks also have a hole for an overflow tube. Tanks do not include a plug as part of the purchase price and many people cannot afford sophisticated overflow tubes with a movable latch. In other words, even a high-quality water tank may have an opening through which

mosquitoes can enter. While the hole is easy to plug when the tanks are inside a house, in some neighbourhoods – especially those where there is constant and informal upward construction of residences – tanks are mounted high up on roofs and not easily accessible.

Public health officials who we accompanied advised residents with broken tops to either replace them or seal holes with an epoxy-like solution. They also sought creative solutions to the problem such as suggesting that old plastic bags be used to plug holes. Yet, when a top was cracked and the only resolution was replacement, families did not always have the funds to purchase new tops, nor did they have access to the transportation necessary to bring newly purchased tops from a store to their home. In one instance, a sanitation worker offered to look for a replacement top in his departmental depot, if the family could find a way to travel to his local office to pick it up.

When larvae were found in water tanks, health officials oriented residents on how to clean the inside surface with a chemical solution. Yet the non-regular arrival of water in this particular neighbourhood made it hard for residents to follow this prescription. When we asked one of the officials why the city did not provide tops or do the cleaning – the city of São Paulo once had a programme that provided tops or a tarp that went over the tank and under a broken top – we were told that it was important for the population to learn that health was their own responsibility. This approach, the official noted, was not working well, and in Brazil, as in other countries, addressing the major contribution of water tanks to mosquito production has been a priority.

Finally, the complications for sanitation agents on the ground level are ever present. Most notable is the concern of occupants about possible home invasions in neighbourhoods where violence and crime are a significant problem. In order to get residents to allow inspections, health agents ask residents to vouch to their neighbours or call the city with the

identification number of the agent. In many cases this approach has been effective. The agents who we accompanied had a legal right to insist on entry but told us that they would not do so for their own personal safety. The addresses of residents who refused to open their houses were carefully noted, and the information was passed on for future action. Analysts and scholars will find this material fascinating when it becomes available.

The emergence of the Zika virus has been accompanied by tragic consequences, particularly for women. By late March 2016, Brazilian authorities had confirmed 907 cases of microcephaly, and 198 babies with the birth defect have died since the Zika virus outbreak began. As of this article's writing, the World Health Organisation predicts that the total number of microcephaly cases in Brazil will soon surpass 2,500.

The current situation has thus brought practical and ethical issues to a head. These challenges reflect the persistence and geography of inequality in Brazil, with the poor both more susceptible to exposure and holding fewer options for treatment, a limited array of reproductive health choices, and the burden of long-term economic costs for themselves and their families. ◆

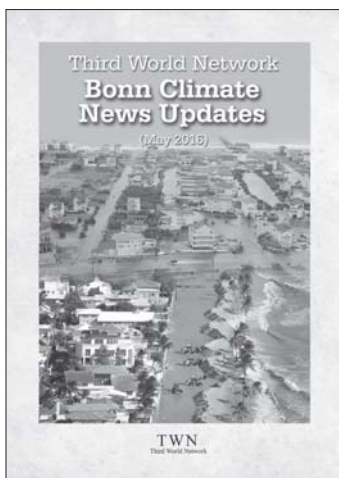
Jeffrey Lesser is the Samuel Candler Dobbs Professor of Brazilian Studies and Chair of the Department of History at Emory University in the US. He is currently a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of São Paulo. His most recent book is Immigration, Ethnicity and National Identity in Brazil (Cambridge University Press, 2013), published in a revised Brazilian edition as A Invenção da Brasilidade: Identidade nacional, etnicidade e políticas de imigração (Editora UNESP, 2015).

Uriel Kitron, PhD, MPH is the Goodrich C. White Professor and Chair of the Department of Environmental Sciences at Emory University. His research and teaching programmes centre around the eco-epidemiology of infectious diseases, with an emphasis on tropical and emerging diseases and environmental risk factors.

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G20 Hangzhou agreement unlikely to heal global economy's malaise

The world economy is in a malaise, and judging by their final communique and the accompanying 100 documents, including some 30 action plans, the annual summit meeting of the Group of 20 (G20) major economies (4-5 September) at Hangzhou, China seems unlikely to heal the malaise.

Aldo Caliarì

EVER since the G20 started meeting at the level of heads of state in November 2008, the economic policy-making community has had its sights set on the grouping. At that time it revealed itself as an effective actor taking forceful steps to coordinate action to stop what could otherwise have been a global meltdown (even though some observers hold that such steps had already been agreed individually by each country, so the grouping as such was not the force propelling them).

However, subsequent G20 actions in successive yearly gatherings have so far failed to bring about a strong recovery of the global economy.

This is in spite of the ever-growing volume of activities by the Group: at Hangzhou, the communique was accompanied by over 100 documents, more than 30 of them being initiatives or action plans endorsed by the Group.

Speaking at the summit, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Managing Director Christine Lagarde summed up the situation by stating that growth had been 'too slow, for too long and for too few'.

The G20 communique recognised that 'growth is still weaker than desirable. Downside risks remain due to potential volatility in the financial markets, fluctuations of commodity prices, sluggish trade and investment, and slow productivity and employ-



G20 leaders meeting at the summit in Hangzhou posing for a group photograph. It is unlikely that the agreements reached in Hangzhou will surmount the challenges confronting the world economy.

ment growth in some countries.'

Will the Hangzhou agreements help surmount the global economic challenges? Unlikely. On three areas of reform that should be central to efforts to reinvigorate the speed and inclusivity of growth, the unveiled G20 agenda was troublingly misguided. These areas were: structural reform, financial regulation, and trade and investment. This article examines the outcomes for each of them in turn.

Structural reform

One of the salient features of the Hangzhou outcome is the prominence it gives to structural reforms, which, in the way the G20 is going about them, is quite problematic.

The justification for focusing on

structural reforms is, ostensibly, a certain sense of desperation about the ineffectiveness of demand support interventions to lift the global economy. But this is a self-serving statement, much truer of monetary policies than of fiscal policies, which are kept on restraint across a growing number of countries.

The G20 skipped revisiting the extent to which different demand interventions are being deployed, in favour of looking at the supply side, with the potential consequence that negative employment and wage effects of such reforms may only worsen the demand gap.

Last year, the IMF had delivered a carefully crafted paper on the matter that some analysts found a bit overreaching. Yet, comparing that paper

with the current G20 approach, it is regrettable that the G20 decided to dispense with even the degree of caution present in that paper.

Firstly, the IMF paper judiciously recognised that structural reforms are very country-specific and need to be cognizant of each country's circumstances and needs. For its part, the G20 makes a nod to national specificity, for instance, stating that the 'choice and design of specific structural reforms must necessarily be informed by a country's macroeconomic environment and national preferences'. But the adoption of a 'common set of indicators' shows a uniform direction of travel that is not to be questioned.

Secondly, the Fund was very emphatic about structural reforms being 'inherently' difficult to measure as they involve 'issues that are not easy to quantify'. The G20 forgets about this 'small' detail, and adopts quantitative indicators whose comprehensiveness, it announces, is set to increase – making, along the way, some very questionable calls.

Strikingly, labour productivity becomes the main outcome to measure as a result of five of the six priority areas for reforms. This approach neglects the difficulties in disentangling labour productivity from that of the other factors of production. Success in increasing labour productivity could also lead to lower employment or happen in the absence of real wage growth, thus putting a further dent on demand. Such variables could have been selected for measurement on their own, but were not.

Thirdly, the IMF should be credited with encompassing as the potential subject of structural reforms – at least at general policy statement level – actions that would need to address market failures as well as government failures. This set the Fund's approach apart from the widely discredited 'structural adjustment programmes' that became a hallmark of the institution in the 1980s and 90s and that were heavily focused on 'getting the government out of the way', being biased towards the latter category of failures.



The Wall Street financial district in New York. The Hangzhou summit outcome seems to see finance as disconnected from all the other problems faced by the global economy.

But a reading of what the G20 means by structural reforms shows it going back to the worst biases of structural adjustment.

One priority reform area is unambiguously called 'Promoting trade and investment openness'. While a growing body of literature advises on the risks of corruption and wasteful spending in public-private partnerships, the infrastructure area of the document raises eyebrows by calling for 'cost-benefit and value-for-money analysis, possibly supplemented by multi-criteria analysis, for *public* infrastructure projects' (emphasis added).

Market failures are not even to be found under 'Enhancing environmental sustainability', which calls for extending 'the use of market-based mechanisms to mitigate pollution and increase resource efficiency'.

Fourthly, the IMF was careful to demarcate its engagement on structural reforms with the need to be guided by its mandate and Articles of Agreement. It is true that if one looks long enough, every economic policy area can potentially have a macroeconomic implication and thus fall under the purview of the Fund. But the Fund knew better than to fall prey to this temptation – an approach that so ill served it in the past – and even said that 'many structural issues will likely remain outside the Fund's areas of expertise'.

It then becomes hard to understand why the G20 insisted on pushing the Fund to carry out analysis on what each G20 country should prior-

itise across all reform areas, without relying on any of the other institutions whose expertise is more suitable to specific portions of the task.

Financial regulation and green finance

Referring to the financial regulation agenda, the G20 leaders in Hangzhou said they remained 'committed to finalising remaining critical elements of the regulatory framework and to the timely, full and consistent implementation of the agreed financial sector reform agenda'.

Seen in the light of the significance of financial regulation for a body created to respond to the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression, the statement betrays a certain sense of complacency.

It assumes the agreed reforms are enough to prevent a crisis and the worst consequences of its aftermath, a proposition that, at the moment, belongs more in the realm of faith than science. But perhaps the most problematic (and less scientific) aspect of such complacency is that it seems to see finance as disconnected from all the other problems the communiqué rightly recognises (slowing trade, weak demand, limited growth, de-industrialisation and so on).

In fact, if one reads this together with the growing structural reform agenda, the message is quite clear: 'Everybody else has to adjust, just not finance.'

For instance, as reported by an observer, financial inclusion did not

seem to be prioritised in this G20 summit.

If one looks only at implementation of the agreed reforms, the picture is not so good, either.

A report by the Financial Stability Board on the matter said, in the diplomatic language in which an intergovernmental body typically addresses the G20: 'Implementation progress remains steady but uneven across the four core areas of the reform programme.' (These areas are building resilient financial institutions; ending too-big-to-fail; making derivatives markets safer; and transforming shadow banking into resilient market-based finance.)

The same report alludes to a number of unintended consequences of the reforms that it keeps under observation. Here, one can find some justifiable ones, such as the impact on emerging markets and developing economies' access to finance. But others, such as 'effects of reforms on financial openness and integration', are an alarming reflection of the push-back by the financial industry, which, past the post-crisis reform momentum, is trying to return to some of its pre-crisis practices.

Thinking of the long-term planetary limits to conceiving growth as usual, the summit's endorsement of a report issued by the Green Finance Study Group set up under the Chinese presidency of the G20 represented an important step.

The G20 recognised the challenges to the development of green finance, such as 'difficulties in internalising environmental externalities, maturity mismatch, lack of clarity in green definitions, information asymmetry and inadequate analytical capacity'.

Given the enormous obstacles China faced in its pioneering effort to install this concept within the G20 finance track (that was staffed by finance ministers and central bankers), the mere inclusion of a paragraph in the declaration could be regarded as a triumph.

However, the fact that the communique only welcomed the 'voluntary options developed by the [Green



The 'Global Strategy for Trade Growth' endorsed in Hangzhou seems to assume that growing global trade will somehow solve all ills and that its benefits will automatically be spread more fairly among and within countries.

Finance Study Group] to enhance the ability of the financial system to mobilise private capital for green investment' gives some cause for concern.

If the concept of green finance is to sustain credibility, it will have to show its capacity to move companies beyond where they would have been by pursuing 'business as usual'. For this it will have to show a proper balance between voluntary and mandatory actions, including regulatory ones.

Trade and investment

One of the symptoms of stagnation of the global economy as shown by recent reports is the continuation of the slowdown in the global volume of trade, which is forecast to be almost unchanged this year from 2015.

It is understandable that the G20 felt compelled to show resolve on this front. But the 'Global Strategy for Trade Growth' endorsed in Hangzhou seems to assume, as its unambiguous title suggests, that somehow growing global trade will solve all ills and that its benefits will automatically be spread (trickle-down?) more fairly among and within countries.

For instance, the strategy says: 'G20 members recognise that facilitating trade and investment will enhance the ability of developing countries and SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises] to participate in and move up the value chain in GVCs [global value chains]', something not borne out by experience.

In fact, the summit declaration does call for 'policies that encourage firms of all sizes ... to take full advantage of global value chains and that encourage greater participation, value addition and upward mobility in GVCs by developing countries, particularly low-income countries'.

But all experiences of countries that have managed to do that in real life, show them precisely relying on active use of trade and investment policies, not on some expectation that the automatic effect of expanding trade would lead them in that direction.

In fact, to some extent in open contradiction with such an objective, the G20 also adopted the Guiding Principles on Investment Policymaking that had been endorsed earlier in the year by its trade ministers. The principles recognise the right of governments to regulate investment, but also profess an intention to move towards 'open, non-discriminatory' conditions for investment.

While at the moment these are principles that the G20 have adopted for themselves and should not necessarily apply to other countries, the United States reportedly tried to introduce them in the 14th session of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – a universal membership organisation – last July.

Salutary lessons can be drawn from the field of tax cooperation – where developing countries are expected to follow OECD-crafted rules

‘on an equal footing’ – and one cannot rule out the prospect of non-G20 countries being asked to join ‘on an equal footing’ the implementation of such investment principles in future. Embedding such principles into multilateral rules on investment – a position rejected by more than 70 countries at the Cancun World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference in 2003 – is, furthermore, an explicit demand by the Business 20 (the coalition of business associations from the G20 countries).

Along these lines, the G20 members extended ‘their commitments to standstill and rollback of protectionist measures till the end of 2018’. One might object to the bluntness of the methodology used in such survey. However, the fact that the latest report by UNCTAD, the WTO and the OECD shows the monthly average of trade restrictions at the highest level registered since the G20 asked them to undertake the survey for the first time (in 2009), raises questions beyond that, about the general value of such a pledge.

Industrialisation is perhaps the single most important item in achieving a fairer distribution of the gains from trade. Thus, the Hangzhou commune’s decision to launch a New Industrial Revolution Action Plan was well-placed. With the commodity price shock revealing again how little has changed in the structure of developing countries’ economies – undiversified and largely commodity-dependent – focusing energies on how they can industrialise was long overdue.

Unfortunately, the components of this agenda are far from what developing countries need. This was probably to be expected, given the composition of the G20, which, in providing the background on the Action Plan, mentioned the efforts of individual countries, most of which are developed ones.

Still, this is not the major objection one could make to the agenda. Sustainable development will require a transformation of industry, even in already industrialised countries. The problem is the assumption that seems to permeate this plan, that everybody, no matter their level of development, has to do the same thing.

The New Industrial Revolution Action Plan, together with an Innovation Action Plan, were part of a ‘Blueprint on Innovative Growth’ launched by the G20 leaders. The Action Plan prioritises dimensions that are clearly not the ones that developing countries would care about.

A conspicuous example is intellectual property rights. One of the main obstacles poor countries face in trying to industrialise is the lack of technology and the extremely high prices attached to accessing it from the companies – mostly oligopolies in developed countries – that have it. While developing countries’ repeated demand has therefore been for facilitation of technology transfer, existing rules on intellectual property rights such as the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) have acted as an obstacle in this regard.

But the Action Plan is geared to further strengthening protection of intellectual property rights. At one point, it makes the seemingly contradictory call for ‘effective protection and enforcement of... voluntary technology transfer’ (emphasis added).

It also recognises that ‘enterprises are free to base technology transfer decisions on business and market considerations, and are free to independently negotiate and decide whether and under what circumstances to assign or license intellectual property rights to affiliated or unaffiliated enterprises’. This prompts the question of whether it is the best use of the forum of the most powerful economies in the world to restate what companies already do in any case.

Similar doubts apply to the priority attached to ‘cooperation in development of standards’, which, if it is to be carried out in the G20, may easily become one more barrier for developing countries. These countries already spend significant time and resources trying to catch up to the many standards set by countries and companies that, as a result of having created the standard initially, get to enjoy insurmountable ‘first-mover’ advantages.

There are, however, other aspects in the Action Plan that are more in sync with developing countries’ needs, for instance, skills and adapt-

ability of the workforce to the requirements of industrialisation and SMEs’ lack of ‘resources and information to help them implement and benefit from new technologies’. It will be important to follow what tangible action the G20 is ready to take on these fronts.

In relation to multilateral trade negotiations at the WTO, a key political development to underscore was the G20 leaders’ commitment ‘to shape the post-Nairobi work with development at its centre and commit[ment] to advancing negotiations on the remaining [Doha Development Agenda] issues as a matter of priority ...’

At the end of the WTO Ministerial Conference in Nairobi last December, a group of developed countries had insisted on not recognising the currency of the Doha Development Agenda anymore unless developing countries were ready to commit to including new issues on the agenda.

Unfortunately, the G20 breakthrough on the Doha Development Agenda was not necessarily a net gain. As reported by the *South-North Development Monitor (SUNS)*, the cost to pay for such agreement was the mention in the Hangzhou commune that ‘a range of issues may be of common interest and importance to today’s economy, and thus may be legitimate issues for discussions in the WTO, including those addressed in regional trade arrangements (RTAs) and by the Business 20’.

The influence and access of the business community – completely out of sync with that of civil society – in trade negotiations is no secret. However, the direct, explicit and, in this case, open-ended reference to the agenda of a specific group of large businesses in political commitments on trade is an unprecedented development of alarming proportions. ♦

Aldo Caliari is Director of the Rethinking Bretton Woods Project at the Washington-based Center of Concern. This article is reproduced from the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS, No. 8316, 21 September 2016). The full version of the article including footnotes can be found at www.coc.org/rbw/g20-hangzhou-agreement-unlikely-heal-global-economy%E2%80%99s-malaise

Climate change: Hangman of the poor

Climate change affects the world disproportionately and it is developing countries which, though not historically liable for it, have to bear the brunt of its adverse effects. *Nnimmo Bassey* explains, with particular focus on Africa, the nature of the threats facing countries which are financially and economically ill-equipped to meet them.

THE impact of the climate crisis, which is disproportionately felt by those that have contributed least to the crisis, is undisputed. This is why the concept of 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (CBDR) is seen as a key principle by which climate justice is introduced into the climate debate. This same reasoning led to the creation of the Annex I and non-Annex I categories of nations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in order to have those most implicated in the climate debacle take greater steps or actions to tackle the menace.

Since the 15th session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 15) in 2009, the idea of having nations committed to emissions reduction at levels required by science has been sidelined. At COP 21 in Paris last December, leaders set targets for temperature increase of 1.5°C or 'well below' 2°C. We remember that at COP 15, the lead negotiator for the developing-country Group of 77 (G77), Lumumba Di-Aping, denounced the 2°C warming target as 'certain death for Africa'. He also characterised it as a type of 'climate fascism' that was being forced on Africa. He wondered why Africa was asked to sign an agreement that would permit an unacceptable level of warming in exchange for \$10 billion, and also being asked to celebrate such a deal.¹

At COP 21 the idea of binding emissions reduction targets was totally jettisoned, in a manner that underscores the high level of power play and global dominance by rich industrialised nations which are determined

to avoid responsibility for the climate crisis. The Paris Agreement of COP 21 has been applauded by political leaders across the world and celebrated by mainstream media and transnational corporations mostly because it marked the first time nations agreed that action had to be taken to combat climate change. A close examination of the document shows, however, that the real agreement by political leaders was that: while climate change demanded action, they could essentially perpetuate business as usual, without recourse to what science requires. The actions they would take are called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). As the name indicates, nations state what they intend to contribute to tackling the looming crisis according to national interests, with the NDCs being subject to review every five years and coming into effect by 2020.

It has turned out that if emissions are reduced at the levels nations have said they would contribute, we will be on track for a global temperature rise far above the 'well below' 2°C target set by COP 21. We should note at this point that the polluting nations are punching far below their weight in terms of emissions reduction while the poorer, vulnerable nations have pledged to do much more than their fair share. That is the classic way of turning justice on its head.

The Paris Agreement is loaded with good intentions that are not backed by commitments to take requisite action. Added to the NDCs, the agreement left a hole through which false solutions such as REDD+, geo-engineering, carbon trading/offsets

and other market environmentalism schemes could gain ascendancy. 'Solutions' such as REDD+ (REDD stands for 'reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries') transfer the burden of action to curb global warming to vulnerable forest communities, for example, in ways that further deepen their vulnerability. Meanwhile geo-engineering entails intentional weather modification efforts that essentially put the planetary climate thermostat into the hands of powerful entities that could be governments or corporations. Computer models used to check the impacts of pumping sulphates into the stratosphere, for example, indicate serious implications for nations in the Global South.

Computer modelling in two peer-reviewed scientific papers showed, among other findings, that 'sulphate injections into the [Southern Hemisphere] could increase precipitation in the Sahel region by up to 100 mm/month, but decrease precipitation in the South West [of Africa] by up to 60 mm/month ... Similar results were found regarding NPP [Net Primary Productivity] with an increase in the Sahel region by up to 100% but a decrease in the South West by up to 60% and also in the Magreb area of up to 20%. [The authors also noted that] Brazil could see a decrease in both NPP and precipitation. In a scenario where sulphate is injected into the [Northern Hemisphere], the Sahelian region is subject to reductions in NPP by as much as 60-100% ... The precipitation pattern in the region could be affected by a reduction of 20-80mm/month ... In this scenario,

Southern Africa could see increases in both NPP and precipitation.⁷²

Urgent actions are needed and they must not be such as would create more problems for the poorest. One of the factors that hamper climate action is finance. It must be stated here that if the ecological or climate debt owed the Global South were recognised and paid, there will be no debate about who contributes how much, and who can access, climate funds. The debates always tend to suggest that finding needed finance is a herculean task; meanwhile enough funds that could make a huge difference are stashed away in tax havens by a handful of individuals and corporations. A recent report by Friends of the Earth International shows that 13 richest persons in the world have enough money to provide renewable energy to all of Africa within 15 years, for instance. Meanwhile the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative is looking for \$10 billion between 2015 and 2020 to tackle energy poverty on the continent. In terms of the Green Climate Fund, the target is \$100 billion per year from 2020. Meanwhile, the rich nations are spending over \$1 trillion a year on destructive military hardware and warfare. The point is that the money is there; what is lacking is commitment to face the planetary crisis.

What are the implications of this lack of commitment and readiness to act?

The world is currently enamoured with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a fitting successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). If sustainable development is to be attainable and not an oxymoron, we must become conscious of the fact that the very concept of lineal development or growth is an impossibility on a finite planet. The targets or goals will remain mere pipedreams in a climate-changed world. For the goals to be met, tackling global warming cannot be based on nationally determined contributions.

The casualties of climate change

are many. They include those whose nations, territories and communities are being washed away by rising sea levels, floods and coastal erosion. They include those whose lands are suffering desertification. There are casualties braving deserts, seas and oceans to find a foothold on higher lands.

A major area of vulnerability is agriculture and food production. Real climate actions are needed to build resilience into agricultural systems before catastrophic climate change sets in. The 1996 World Food Summit declared that 'Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.'⁷³ This indicates that food security must rest on four pillars: availability of food, accessibility to food, suitable utilisation of food, and the presence of these three in a stable way. When hazards meet vulnerability, the inevitable outcome is disaster. No hazard is more pressing globally than climate change.

Some 80% of the food in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia is produced by smallholder or family farms.⁷⁴ They depend on natural resources such as forests and shrub lands for their livelihoods as farmers and pastoralists. They also depend on rivers, lakes and creeks for fish. The tragedy is that governments seldom think of the smallholder farmer when they think of agriculture. They think more of industrial agriculture which utilises chemical inputs with heavy dependence on fossil fuels. Apart from the concomitant land grabs, displacement of smallholder farmers, and destruction of food systems and ecosystems, industrial agriculture, including cash cropping through plantations, exacerbates climate change.

Besides the threat to food security, there is a greater risk to food sovereignty. Understanding the difference between food sovereignty and food security is important for us to grasp the grave impact that climate change has on agriculture and nutrition. Food sovereignty speaks of the

right of peoples to grow crops and produce foods that are healthy, suit their ecosystems and are culturally appropriate. Food security, in comparison, is concerned with having food in sufficient quantities. These two concepts are not opposed to one another, but rather food security is best secured in the context of food sovereignty. What does this mean?

Increasing temperatures and freak weather events are bound to have profound impacts on agricultural systems.

With a simple focus on food security, it does not matter what food a person eats, provided she eats something. The food could be totally alien to the individual, but to erase hunger, whatever food is available has to be consumed. Mere food security eliminates choice and forces people, for example, to eat genetically modified (GM) foods, even when they are opposed to the technology. This was the sore point that Zambia was confronted with when the country faced food shortages in 2002.⁷⁵ At that time Zambia insisted on being given milled and not whole grain GM maize to avoid contamination of indigenous species. The struggle over what food to receive or reject became a source of big debates and geopolitical power play. A major newspaper in the country, the *Zambia Daily Mail*, had this to say: 'It is very interesting to note that for the first time Zambia was being forced to accept a gift. Doesn't this worry us as recipients, that the giver is insisting that we take the GM foods? Are the Americans just concerned about our stomachs or there is something behind the gift?'⁷⁶

Increasing temperatures and freak weather events are bound to have profound impacts on agricultural systems. The magnitude of these impacts would determine how the remaining carbon budget is managed or

expended. The race to colonise the atmosphere is on and will likely intensify with nations making voluntary pledges to cut emissions. The implication of such voluntary pledges and actions is that sufficient resilience will not be built into our food and infrastructural systems. That translates to the harsh fact that vulnerable nations and regions will be incapable of coping with resulting loss and damage.

El Niño, La Niña and desert locusts

El Niño is a weather pattern which happens as a result of the warming of the Pacific Ocean near the equator, off the coast of South America. It occurs when trade winds off the Pacific coast of South America weaken, or at times reverse, letting the warm water of the western Pacific flow instead towards the east. This change sets off atmospheric changes triggered by the warm water displacing the cooler water that is normally found near the surface of the eastern Pacific. This abnormal weather situation sets in motion altered weather events in many parts of the world. It occurs every 2-7 years and does not have a regular pattern.⁷ This recurring cycle thus goes with variations in sea-surface temperatures, convective rainfall, surface air pressure and atmospheric circulation across the equatorial Pacific Ocean. The opposite to this is called La Niña.

A minimum 0.5°C temperature increase has to occur in the waters of the eastern Pacific Ocean near the equator for it to be considered an El Niño year. It is not clear how these phenomena will change in the age of climate change, but the associated precipitation variability on regional scales is likely to increase due to larger moisture availability in the atmosphere.⁸ With heightened unpredictability in precipitation as well as the cyclic occurrence of the El Niño and La Niña phenomena, it is obvious that food systems will come under greater stress and plans must be made to absorb or cope with the shocks.

One cause to worry about these changes in temperature, rainfall and wind patterns associated with climate

change is the effect they may have on the desert locust in Africa. The land mass from West Africa to the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and southwest Asia will be particularly exposed to the impacts of this highly destructive migratory pest. Warmer temperatures and increased rainfall in desert areas cause the locust to mature sooner and have a shorter lifecycle; the breeding season begins earlier than normal and continues beyond the usual. It is expected that with a combination of a general increase in precipitation, higher rainfall events and tropical cyclones in the Arabian Sea, locust numbers may increase more rapidly and, if not adequately controlled, may become plagues.

Water stress

The quantity and pattern of rainfall affect the availability of water. Already we are seeing a significant shrinkage of a water body such as Lake Chad. Others like Lake Turkana are under threat from proposed dams and other factors. Lake Chad, located at the intersection of Cameroon, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, has shrunk from over 25,000 square kilometres in the early 1960s to less than 2,000 square kilometres. This has led to the displacement of farmers, pastoralists and fisherfolks. The resultant loss of livelihood is seen to be contributing to the violence in northeast Nigeria as well as in the country's Middle Belt region where violent conflicts between herdsmen and farmers flare up frequently.

Water wars or conflicts will likely intensify as freshwater systems get salinised through sea level rise and incursion of seawater. It has been estimated that by 2030 climate-related conflicts will rise by 54% in Africa. This could be directly linked with the availability of water. Overall, it is estimated that by 2020 up to 75-250 million people in Africa will face water stress. Changes in rainfall patterns will affect the distribution and health of wetlands, streams and rivers. When rainfall is reduced in arid and semi-arid areas, serious water stress is experienced, while other re-

gions may have increased rainfall and be confronted with new challenges on how to cope with floods.

Biodiversity changes

Climate change and rising temperatures affect ecosystems in many ways. One vital way is through the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria. It is estimated that up to 90 million more people in Africa will by 2030 be exposed to malaria, already the biggest killer in Sub-Saharan Africa, due to weather variations.

There are also effects on beneficial insects and birds, including those that help in the process of pollination. Pests and invasive and alien species can have direct impacts on livestock and general food production. For livestock, temperature variations affect the animals directly. It is projected that diseases such as West Nile virus, bluetongue or Lyme and schistosomiasis (bilharzia) may expand into new areas. Increased rainfall and flooding due to El Niño has also been implicated in outbreaks of Rift Valley fever in East Africa.

Increases in pest infestation which result in health issues and loss of forages and water sources create more challenges. The changes in crop and livestock productivity would have implications for availability and accessibility to food, which could instigate disaffection and riots. These impacts will also be reflected in existing geographical variations in ways that could see increased productivity in some regions and reduction in others. Climate change can easily lead to the erosion of genetic resources, including crop, animal and fish species.

Reduced rainfall and shrinking water bodies affect the presence and diversity of riverine fisheries. Assessments by researchers report that the impacts of climate change on fisheries and aquaculture will be felt most acutely in Africa and South Asia.⁹

Climate impacts on forests directly translate to livelihood challenges for the estimated 1.6 billion people who depend on forests for livelihoods. Forests provide timber and non-timber products, and protect water sources and soils. Forests are vul-

nerable to droughts and increased temperatures. Climate impacts will include loss of forest biodiversity through tree mortality, fire outbreaks and human pressures.

Human pressure includes conversion of forests into plantations, with the accompanying loss of biodiversity. It also includes the pursuit of infrastructural development such as roads through forests. A current case in point is a proposed superhighway that threatens to erode community forests as well as a major forest reserve in Cross River State in Nigeria. The sore point with the proposed highway is that the government revoked occupancy rights of communities within a 10 km stretch on either side of the highway. By estimates, the highway and the lands girding it would take up 25% of the landmass of Cross River State. Analysts insist that the superhighway can easily be re-routed to preserve the communities as well as enormous biodiversity which includes rare and endangered species. It is also noted that the highway will lead to massive deforestation with grave climate change implications.

The 260 km road is planned to lead from a proposed deep sea port at Esighi in Bakassi Local Government Area through the Cross River National Park and up to Katsina Ala in Benue State, at a cost of 700 billion naira or about \$3.5 billion. Observers think the project may be a cover for land grabbing, illegal logging and poaching and the destruction of habitats in the forests and reserves that are protected by law and preserved by custom. They question why a project of this nature would reportedly enjoy contributions from Nigerian banks without requisite preliminary surveys, plans and approvals.¹⁰

Climate injustice and sundry impacts

The climate impacts we have discussed thus far illustrate inherent injustices: the poor and the vulnerable are the ones mostly at risk. Poor levels of social investment leave the poor vulnerable and without protection as unpredictable weather events manifest. They are the most hit by food

losses, sicknesses, infrastructure destruction, droughts, floods and water stress. They are poor, and climate change makes them poorer still. They are the ones expected to take real climate action, like protecting their forests, yet they are the last to be compensated when the booty of market environmentalism (through the commodification of nature) is to be shared. Within this scenario lies also hidden gender injustice exacerbated by imposed gender roles, oppression and patriarchy.

There were serious floods in various African countries in 2012. As we write this, there are warnings to communities in the flood plains of the Benue and Niger rivers to brace themselves for heavier floods this year. The floods of 2012 displaced 530,000 people in Niger between July and September, while six million were displaced with over 300 deaths in Nigeria. Thousands more were displaced in Mali, Kenya, Uganda, Chad, South Africa, Mozambique, Somalia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Sudan, Mauritania and others.¹¹ Flooding cost Mozambique a whopping \$550 million in 2000 and lowered the national gross domestic product (GDP) by 1.5%. For Nigeria, the 2012 floods brought a 0.36% drop in GDP.

With a 2°C warming above pre-industrial temperatures, it is estimated that there could be permanent reductions in per capita food consumption of 4-5 %. With current trends in temperature increase, about 20% of Sub-Saharan Africa's arable land may become much less suitable for farming by 2080.

A paradigm shift from a one-dimensional characterisation of responsibility and suffering to dimensions of fairness and justice is necessary to move beyond the impasse in international climate negotiations and improve national-level policy-making. The inequalities which are associated with human-induced elements, unequal distribution of impacts, unequal responsibility for and disproportionate cost of climate change mitigation and adaptation have shaped vulnerability and capacities for adaptation. There should be a shift from a simple dual classification of winners

and losers derived from locations in sensitive biophysical systems to include political, economic and social determinants of vulnerability and adaptation capabilities. ♦

Nnimmo Bassey is Director of the Nigeria-based ecological think-tank Health of Mother Earth Foundation and Coordinator of Oilwatch International. He chairs the board of Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria and is a former chair of Friends of the Earth International. He is the author of To Cook a Continent: Destructive Extraction and the Climate Crisis in Africa (Pambazuka Press, 2012). He was a recipient of the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize') in 2010.

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Climate change, agriculture and food security in Latin America and the Caribbean

Like many regions in the developing world dependent on agriculture, Latin America and the Caribbean are confronting threats to their food security as a result of climate change. The following survey details the pressures facing societies in this region.



Smallholder farmers in Bolivia. Bolivia is one of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean whose crop-farming sector is likely to be hardest hit by climate change.

Climate change and agriculture

THE impact of climate change in Latin America and the Caribbean will be considerable, owing to the region's economic dependence on agriculture, the low adaptive capacity of its population and the geographical location of certain countries. In the northeast of Brazil, part of the Andean region and Central America, climate change is expected to impact crop yields and local economies, and compromise food security. Also expected are displacements – in altitude and latitude – of the optimum zones for growing major species such as coffee, sugarcane, potatoes and maize, among oth-

ers. Moreover, pressure of diseases and pests is forecast to increase, along with a reduction in the availability of water for food production and other uses in the semi-arid zones and tropical Andes. This is the result of the retreat of glaciers, reduced rainfall and increased evaporative-transpiration in the semi-arid zones (Magrin, 2015).

According to existing models, agriculture in Latin America and the Caribbean is the economic activity most affected by climate change; and the countries whose crop-farming sectors are likely to be hardest hit by climate change (Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Plurinational State of Bolivia) are

those that already have food security problems, according to information from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) in 2015.

Although some of the region's countries have made progress in designing climate change adaptation plans for the agriculture sector, it is a major challenge. Without considering the necessary policy changes and in terms of financial resources alone, needs are estimated at around 0.02% of regional gross domestic product (GDP) per year (ECLAC, 2015a).

Between 2008 and 2015, studies were made of the economics of climate change in various Latin American and Caribbean countries. The key objective of this regional initiative was to demonstrate the economic importance that climate change will have for societies, productive systems and the natural heritage of the region's countries over the next 100 years, to provide national and local policymakers with a tool enabling them to incorporate the relevant costs and benefits in their analysis. In this framework, the potential impacts of climate change were evaluated, adaptation alternatives were studied, and projections of greenhouse gas emissions were analysed, along with the miti-

gation options for each country. A methodology inspired in the 2007 Stern Report on the Economics of Climate Change was used, with projections of changes in temperature and precipitation in the different regions of the countries based on climate models. The economic impacts were determined on the main sectors affected such as agriculture and food security, water resources, health and the impact on coastal zones, among others.

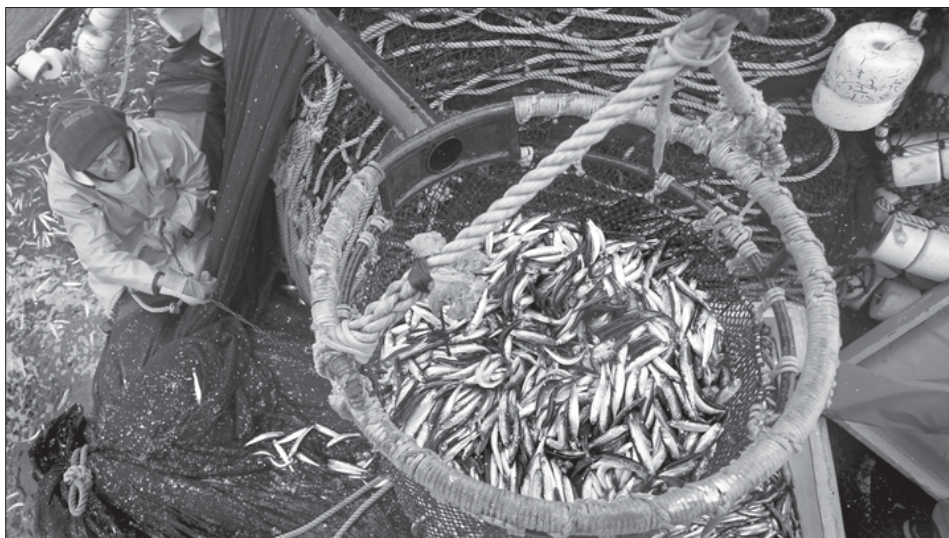
In the case of Central America, subsistence farmers account for 60% of the region's farmers. Projections in a very pessimistic scenario, with a greater increase in temperature, show a growing number of departments in which hectare yields decline, both in maize and in beans, two of the main crops in the subregional diet.

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the impact of changes in temperature and precipitation is likely to reduce rural incomes by an average of 20%. The Department of Potosí, the country's poorest, will be the worst affected, with rural incomes falling by 34% (ECLAC/IDB, 2014).

The same study shows how traditional agriculture and agribusiness in the Plurinational State of Bolivia would be the worst affected sectors in 2100, in the scenarios of greatest temperature increase and least temperature increase.

In the case of Peru, the projections show that the impact of climate change on agriculture is likely to generate decreased production of several basic crops under all scenarios, especially those requiring more water such as rice, which would be most serious in the highest temperature rise scenario.

High Andean livestock activity is also important for food security. Projections show that the livestock-carrying capacity of the Puna ecoregion would be adversely affected by climate change, with effects manifesting themselves in variations in plant coverage and land use. The contribu-



Peruvian fishermen hauling in their catch. Various factors stemming from climate change could affect fishery productivity in Latin America and the Caribbean.

tion of this zone to the national economy would decline considerably, and the food security of population groups that depend on this activity would be compromised. Up to late 2010, there were 6,609 recognised *campesino* (peasant) communities in Peru, characterised by their high level of poverty, working mainly in extensive livestock grazing. These *campesino* families account for roughly 69% of rural families and 30% of all families in the country. The results for the analysis of the three climate scenarios suggest a progressive reduction in ecosystem carrying capacity and a reduction in the available area of grazing lands.

A similar but more fluctuating trend is projected in Paraguay, with falling yields in the main family farming crops under the highest temperature increase scenario.

Consequences of changes in the annual distribution of precipitation

Owing to climate change, variations in the annual volume and distribution of precipitation are forecast, with intense rainfall set to increase by roughly 7% for every degree Celsius by which temperature rises (UNEP, 2012).

The increase in rainfall intensity has adverse consequences for agriculture, such as increased erosion, an

increase in run-off with a loss of available water, and even damage to the crops themselves. In the plants' growth phase there are critical periods in which water availability is essential. Changes in the distribution of rains throughout the year could endanger the production of milpa (agrosystem with simultaneous maize, bean and squash crops), which constitutes the base of the rural diet in Meso-America.

In the period spanning 1950 to 2000, in the Central American zones located by the Pacific Ocean there was a dry season and another rainy one, with the first peak in June and a decline in July and August (heatwave or Indian summer), and another peak in September and October, normally more intensive than the first. Under the highest temperature increase scenario, the bimodal pattern of precipitation is expected to accentuate in the next few decades, with increases in both high rainfall periods and reduction during the Indian summer period. Subsequently, the rains of the first period are expected to gradually decline, leaving a single annual peak between October and November.

As regards rainfall intensity, the precipitation records of the municipality of Ilopango in El Salvador show an increase in rainfall events lasting 10 consecutive days. Although there is no analysis with an extensive universe of rainfall records, the pre-

precipitation records in Ilopango make it possible to observe the trend projected in the climate change models (ECLAC, 2015b).

In 2014, Central America was hit by a major drought that affected the production of the first basic grain crop, particularly maize and beans. Lack of rainfall occurred precisely during the most critical phases of crop development (27 consecutive days in a total of 45 days without rain between July and August). Over 500,000 families in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua were registered as suffering from serious food insecurity as a result of the severe drought.

Fishing and aquaculture: unsustainable management of fisheries and effects of climate change

Latin America and the Caribbean is home to three of the world's major marine ecosystems: the most important is the Humboldt current system (Chile, Ecuador and Peru) which concentrates roughly 20% of total fish capture worldwide. The Patagonian platform (Argentina and Uruguay) and the southern Brazil platform are the other important ecosystems.

Fishery and aquaculture production in the region amounted to roughly 13.5 million tonnes in 2014 (8% of global production), of which 79% corresponded to captures and 21% to aquaculture. Ninety percent of this production occurs (in descending order) in Peru, Chile, Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador and Argentina. Paradoxically, the region is a net exporter and has the world's lowest per capita consumption, along with Africa (9.7 kg per person per year) – roughly half of the world average (FAO, 2014).

Worldwide, roughly 29% of fish stocks were being exploited at a biologically unsustainable level (overfished) in 2011. In the region, a number of species such as Argentina hake and Brazilian sardinella are considered overfished, while the status of Argentine squid is between fully exploited and overfished.

In terms of the repercussions of climate change on marine and aquatic ecosystems, there are still many gaps in the information. In the case of maritime fishing, changes in water temperature, ocean currents, acidification and other conditions affect fishery productivity. Temperate water species are migrating towards the poles.

The various factors stemming from climate change that could affect fishery and aquaculture production include the following:

- Rising sea levels, retreat of glaciers, changes in rainfall patterns and the intensity and frequency of phenomena such as El Niño/La Niña. These factors will affect the stability of marine and continental resources in the regions affected. It will reduce areas devoted to aquaculture in coastal zones and will also require a change in fishing practices and the location of ports.
- Ocean acidification. pH levels have declined from an average of around 8.2 in the pre-industrial era to roughly 8.1 today, and they could fall to 7.8 by 2100 (UNEP, 2012). Acidification affects coral reefs and species that are critical to ocean food webs, including several important human food sources such as crustaceans and molluscs.

Aquaculture and continental-shelf fishing, however, will be affected in some regions, by water stress and competition for water. Variations are also expected in the abundance of species used to produce food and meal. Aquaculture systems that have little or no reliance on inputs of fishmeal (such as bivalves and macroalgae) are considered to have better chances of expansion than productive systems that depend on the products of fish capture.

In terms of food security, climate change will affect the availability of foods, the stability of supplies and access to foods of aquatic origin, owing to changes in livelihoods and in levels of capture or harvest possibilities.

There are models that forecast

significant changes in capture potential between regions. In general, captures will increase in high latitudes and decline in the tropics, areas that are more socioeconomically vulnerable. This will have consequences for global food security, particularly communities in tropical areas that depend on fishing for food and income.

Changes in the distribution of captures will adversely affect the region's main fisheries, and fishing activity in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Peru.

Alternatives for increasing the capacity for recovery, adaptation and also the resilience of fishery resource ecosystems include the adoption of ecosystemic approaches in fishing and aquaculture, as proposed in the Sustainable Development Goals.

The occurrence of disasters

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there has recently been an increase in extreme weather events and the number of people affected. The number of storms occurring between 2000 and 2009 was 12 times the number in 1970-79, and floods quadrupled in the same period. The number of persons affected by extreme temperatures, forest fires, droughts, storms and flooding rose from 5 million in the 1970s to over 40 million in the 2000s, as a result of the growth of human settlements in the region's marginal urban zones and also the greater vulnerability of coastal zones to these events. The estimated costs of damage caused by these extreme weather events in the last 10 years exceed \$40 billion (UNEP/ECLAC, 2010).

There is robust evidence of the relation that exists between climate change and potential extreme weather phenomena. The patterns of climate change projected for the end of this century in the region suggest that Central America and the Caribbean will experience more intense hurricanes, together with a reduction in precipitation and thus an increase in drought episodes. These events cause loss of life and also destroy property and livelihoods, and thus weaken the



A woman covers herself against the rain as Hurricane Matthew makes landfall in Haiti in October. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there has recently been an increase in extreme weather events and the number of people affected.

food and nutritional security of the most vulnerable population groups. The poorest inhabitants of rural zones are normally the most vulnerable to the disasters, because they occupy more marginal land and have few resources, so they are forced to engage in unsustainable productive activities in zones exposed to all types of climate threat. They also have a very low recovery capacity, partly owing to the heavy burden of poverty – a situation that is compounded by lack of climate risk preparedness.

Extreme weather events usually bring with them a short-term adverse effect on the population's well-being and a weak or hard-to-identify effect in the medium and long term. These effects depend, among other factors, on the severity and type of disaster, the sector of the economy, the structure and composition of the economy, and the per capita income level. Developing countries are worse hit than developed ones. Analysis of data obtained from 84 countries over 48 years shows that the worst droughts also undermine GDP growth (-1%) and agricultural growth (-2.2%) (Loayza et al., 2009). Floods can also subsequently generate increases in agricultural productivity.

The crop-farming sector regularly suffers more intensively from nat-

ural disasters, which suggests that some subregions, such as Central America and the Caribbean, are particularly sensitive to these phenomena. There are other effects associated with the occurrence of the disasters, such as reduced school attendance, which fosters malnutrition.

The agriculture sector was the worst affected by the two largest disasters suffered in the region – the 1997-98 El Niño episode and Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Estimates made by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), of the impact of the two events on the different economic sectors of the affected countries, show that the greatest damage was caused by the 1997-98 El Niño, which affected several Andean countries and caused total damage estimated at \$7.5 billion for the four countries analysed, of which \$2.3 billion or 30.7% corresponded to damage in the crop-farming sector. In Central America, Hurricane Mitch caused total damage estimated at \$5.4 billion, of which \$2.7 billion or 50% directly affected the crop-farming sector.

Many of the region's countries are already lagging behind in terms of adapting to extreme events. Climate change is forcing them to boost their adaptation efforts, particularly in

the crop-farming sector. ♦

The above is extracted from Food and Nutrition Security and the Eradication of Hunger – CELAC 2025: Furthering Discussion and Regional Cooperation, which was prepared and published by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI). © 2016 United Nations. Reprinted with the permission of the United Nations.

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Climate change's costs are still escalating

Scientific reports released for a recent conference on disaster risk reduction warn that people are already dying and economies being hit by climate change – and that the dangers are growing.

Paul Brown

THE massive economic and health losses that climate change is already causing across the world are detailed in six scientific papers published in July.

Perhaps most striking is the warning about large productivity losses already being experienced due to heat stress, which can already be calculated for 43 countries. One of the papers estimates that in South-East Asia alone, 'as much as 15% to 20% of annual work hours may already be lost in heat-exposed jobs'. And that figure may double by 2030 as the planet continues warming – with poor manual labourers who work outdoors being the worst affected.

The release of the papers coincided with the start of a conference on disaster risk reduction held in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur, and jointly sponsored by the International Institute for Global Health (UNU-IIGH) and the UN Development Programme.

The aim was to alert delegates to the already pressing scale of the problem and the need to take measures to protect the health of people, and to outline the economic costs of not taking action.

Substantial health risks

In an introduction to the six-paper collection, UNU-IIGH research fellows Jamal Hisham Hashim and José Siri write that humanity faces 'substantial health risks from the degradation of the natural life support systems which are critical for human survival. It has become increasingly apparent that actions to mitigate en-



Workers at a construction site near the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur. In 2010 Malaysia lost 2.8% of GDP because of people slowing or stopping work due to the heat.

vironmental change have powerful co-benefits for health.'

The author of the paper on heat stress, Tord Kjellstrom, director of the New Zealand-based Health and Environment International Trust, says: 'Current climate conditions in tropical and subtropical parts of the world are already so hot during the hot seasons that occupational health effects occur and work capacity for many people is affected.'

The worst area for this problem is South-East Asia, with Malaysia being typical. In 2010, the country was already losing 2.8% of gross domestic product (GDP) because of people slowing or stopping work because of the heat. By 2030, this will rise to 5.9% – knocking \$95 billion off the value of the economy.

The most susceptible jobs include the lowest-paid – heavy labour and low-skill agricultural and manufacturing jobs. Even so, the global economic cost of reduced productivity may be more than \$2 trillion by 2030.

India and China are two of the worst-affected economies. By 2030, the annual GDP losses could total \$450 billion, although mitigation may be made possible by a major shift in working hours, which is among several measures employers will need to take to reduce losses.

The list of 43 countries includes many in the hottest parts of the world, but countries in Europe – among them, Germany and the UK – are also on the list, along with the US.

One of the side-effects of this increased heat is the demand for cooling, which is placing a major strain on electricity infrastructure. Kjellstrom notes that the additional energy needed for a single city the size of Bangkok for each 1°C increase of average ambient temperature can be as much as 2,000 MW, which is more than the output of a major power plant.

The rising demand for cooling also contributes to warming the world. Air conditioners not only pump heat out directly, the electricity re-

quired is typically produced by burning fossil fuels, adding to atmospheric greenhouse gases.

People acclimatised to air conditioning also become less heat-tolerant, further increasing demand for cooling. But heat stress is only one of the problems addressed by the papers.

From 1980 to 2012, roughly 2.1 million people worldwide died as a direct result of nearly 21,000 natural catastrophes, such as floods, mudslides, drought, high winds or fires.

The number of people being exposed to disasters has increased dramatically – in cyclone-prone areas, the population has grown in 40 years from 72 million to 121 million.

The papers also say:

- ‘Disastrously heavy rains can expand insect breeding sites, drive rodents from their burrows, and contaminate freshwater resources, leading to the spread of disease and compromising safe drinking water supplies.’

- ‘Warmer temperatures often promote the spread of mosquito-borne parasitic and viral diseases by shifting the vectors’ geographic range and shortening the pathogen incubation period.’

- ‘Climate change can worsen air quality by triggering fires and dust storms and promoting certain chemical reactions causing respiratory illness and other health problems.’

They say that central and south China can anticipate the highest number of casualties from this combination of disasters that will befall them as a result of continuing climate change. This knowledge may help to explain why China has been so proactive in tackling global warming in the last year.

The authors underline the fact that fast-rising numbers of people are being exposed to the impacts of climate change, with much of the increase occurring in cities in flood-prone coastal areas or on hills susceptible to mudslides or landslides. Especially vulnerable are people living in poverty, including about one billion in slums.

Urban planners, the authors say,

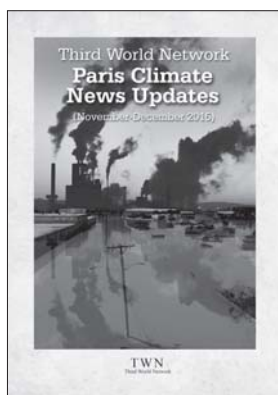
can help by designing cities ‘in ways that enhance health, sustainability, and resilience all at once’ – for example, by incorporating better building design, facilitating a shift to renewable energy, and fostering the protection and expansion of tree cover,

wetlands and other carbon sinks. – *Climate News Network* ◆

Paul Brown, a founding editor of the Climate News Network, is a former environment correspondent of The Guardian and still writes columns for the paper.

Paris Climate News Updates

(November-December 2015)



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This is a collection of 28 News Updates and an analysis prepared by the Third World Network for and during the recent United Nations Climate Change Talks – the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) and the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 11) – in Paris, France from 30 November to 11 December 2015.

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Tunisia on the frontlines of the struggle against climate change

The Kerkennah islanders in Tunisia are faced with a double threat to their existence: rising sea water levels and the extractive operations of fossil fuel companies.

Hamza Hamouchene

KERKENNAH is a group of islands lying off the east coast of Tunisia in the Gulf of Gabès, around 20 kilometres away from the mainland city of Sfax. The two main islands are Chergui and Gharbi. When approaching the islands by ferry, one is struck by a curious sight: the coastal waters are divided into countless parcels, separated from one another by thousands of palm tree leaves. This is what Kerkennah call *charfia*, a centuries-old fishing method ingeniously designed to lure fish into a capture chamber from where they can be easily recovered.

As the land is arid, agricultural activity is limited to subsistence farming. For the islanders fishing is one of the key economic activities, but for big multinational corporations it is the exploitation of oil and gas.

Despite a new article in the Tunisian constitution stipulating state sovereignty over natural resources and transparency in the related contracts, oil and gas companies continue to garner obscene profits and enjoy impunity. At the same time, local communities continue to shoulder the externalised social and environmental costs of this industry.

The Kerkennah archipelago is being doubly dispossessed and doubly threatened: firstly, by the effects of disruptive global warming, and secondly, by the extractive operations of oil and gas companies bent on making super-profits at the expense of the archipelago's development. The collision between neoliberalism and climate change is potentially disastrous for the people of Kerkennah caught in the intricate web of capitalist globalisation.



For the people of the Kerkennah islands, fishing is one of the key economic activities, but for big multinational corporations, it is the exploitation of oil and gas resources.

Fossil fuels and discontented fishermen

I visited Kerkennah in March 2016, after hearing there was simmering discontent about the British oil and gas company Petrofac's refusal to honour its engagements in helping finance an employment fund. On the ferry to the island, I noticed a delegation headed by the Tunisian Minister of Environment accompanied by a TV crew was also on the same boat. I found myself asking: 'Was the purpose of the delegation's visit the same as mine? Were they also there to investigate the now two-month-long labour mobilisation around Petrofac?'

Sit-ins had been organised by the islanders in front of its factory, partially halting production, to pressure the company to honour its engagements and resume payments in the employment fund, which was ensuring their meagre salaries for jobs they were doing in different public administrations.

On the island, we took a taxi to Sidi Fraj beach, thinking we were heading to Petrofac. When we arrived we realised it was not the Petrofac factory but rather the headquarters of another oil company: Thyna Petroleum Services (TPS). There was indeed a protest taking place, organised by fishermen, but this wasn't the unemployed graduates' sit-in that we were looking for.

TPS is a British-Tunisian company exploiting some offshore oil concessions in Kerkennah, and the fishermen were protesting a significant oil spill that, they asserted, was from a submarine pipeline. TPS denied the allegations, declaring that it was instead from a leak in a wellhead on one of the drilling platforms.

The fishermen were angry at what had happened, not just because it was killing fish, endangering marine biodiversity and thus threatening their livelihood, but also because TPS attempted to cover up and downplay the impact of the spillage. They told

us that this was not the first time, but rather the third or fourth time this had occurred.

The visit of the Minister of Environment was not exactly what I anticipated. He had indeed been dispatched to the island as a result of this situation, and to reassure the fishermen and other Kerkennis that an investigation would be carried out and that measures would be taken to clean the mess. However, it seemed less likely that he was there to address the fishermen's grievances than to protect the interests of the oil industry by helping to avoid an escalation and radicalisation of the protests. This was particularly pressing at a time when another oil and gas company was being targeted by the people's anger.

Petrofac at the centre of the Kerkenni uprising

Ten years after acquiring the Chergui gas concession in Kerkennah through a corrupt deal, and five years after Tunisia's uprising for bread, freedom and social justice, Petrofac faces growing discontent on the island. In the first two weeks of April, Kerkennah was the scene of violent police repression of protests that targeted the company.

The protests and repression that ensued (including allegations of torture) came after the police violently dismantled the months-long peaceful sit-in by the Kerkenni unemployed graduates, represented by a national union (Union des Diplômés Chômeurs), in front of Petrofac's gas factory. The purpose of this sit-in had been to pressure the British company to resume its contributions to an employment fund, the closure of which had caused hundreds of people to lose their jobs.

On the island, the young people who had participated in the February-March sit-in conveyed their determination to defend their rights and to recover their lost jobs. When talking to them, you could sense a certain resentment and anger at what they were enduring. How is it possible to be unemployed with such a wealth of oil and gas on the islands? What hap-

pened to the promises of the 2011 revolution and the demands of social justice and national dignity? These interrogations echo the sentiments of many Tunisians across the country, who are still fighting the same pauperisation, corruption and everyday injustices that sparked the popular uprising five years ago.

While Petrofac's responsibilities and duties in developing the island and helping create jobs have come under scrutiny, its corrupt involvement in acquiring 45% of the Chergui gas concession in Kerkennah has gone largely unreported. A series of Tunisian court documents revealed Petrofac's role in bribing Moncef Trabelsi, the brother-in-law of former president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. Trabelsi was convicted in October 2011 for accepting bribes in relation to helping secure the concession permit for Petrofac.

Despite Trabelsi's conviction and prison sentence for accepting a \$2 million bribe, the British businessman and company named as paying the bribe have avoided investigation in the UK and Tunisia and continue to enjoy impunity. This is not the first time Petrofac has been implicated in a corruption scandal: one of its former top bosses has been reported to have paid \$2 million in bribes to win a contract in Kuwait.

What becomes apparent by studying the oil and gas sector is that Tunisian authorities consider the practices associated with the fossil fuel industry a Pandora's box they are afraid of opening. We still see the same repressive methods employed by a state that clearly chose to be on the side of the oil and gas multinationals, at the expense of the legitimate demands of people who want simply to lead decent lives.

This choice, or rather the obligation, to side with these multinationals does not occur in a vacuum and must be understood within the neoliberal framework, in the context of a paid counter-revolutionary pact imposed on Tunisia with the approval of a domestic elite that appears subservient to global capital.

Young people holding protract-

ed sit-ins, protests and occupations, halting the production of key industries and demanding jobs, is now a common sight across the country. The state's failure and incapacity to provide these is the result of a reckless insistence on applying the same recipe for disaster and is one aspect of the neoliberal violence being relentlessly visited on Tunisians.

Threatened by climate change

Kerkennah is one of the most vulnerable places in the Mediterranean. It has a semi-arid climate with a long dry summer season, high temperatures and water evaporation, and an average water deficit of 1,000 mm/year. The rise of sea levels due to global warming is endangering the low-lying archipelago as the maximum height is 13 metres, with most of the land lying below 10 metres.

Several studies have already documented the erosion and retreat of the coastline, estimating it at more than 10 centimetres a year. In some areas, this erosion reached 40 metres in less than 50 years, further emphasising the danger of disappearance of the islands. The archipelago could be transformed into a bigger number of small islands and the submerged surface could reach 30% of the total (around 4,500 hectares) by 2100 if global carbon emissions are not reduced drastically.

Today we see that in less than three decades, the zones called *sebkhas* (coastal salt flats) that constitute almost half the surface of the archipelago have expanded by 20%. Seawater is intruding into groundwater reserves and the soil is becoming more saline. All of this is exacerbating water scarcity, killing nearby palm trees and eating into potentially arable land, increasing the food and economic vulnerability of the population.

Droughts caused a significant decrease in the islands' population throughout the 1980s. The islands were unable to provide suitable irrigation systems and, with clean water rapidly running out, many islanders were forced to leave for mainland Tunisia. Currently, the population is

estimated at 15,000. This number increases almost by tenfold, reaching 150,000, in the summer when former islanders return home.

The violence of climate change is not natural, but instead is driven by a set of choices made by those in power: the choice to keep burning fossil fuels – a choice made by corporations and by Western governments, together with domestic elites and military leaderships of the Global South, including Tunisia.

Climate change is only one aspect of the imperialist logic of plundering nature and people, and the fossil fuel industry plays a crucial role in causing this phenomenon. It is responsible for what may be termed ‘energy colonialism’, or the attempt to grab more resources in order to maximise profits. Companies are unconcerned with the ecological and social ramifications of their actions, including the degradation of the environment (water pollution in the case of Kerkennah), and the further dispossession of people in the Global South.

In fact, repeated marine pollution caused by this industry combined with rising sea temperatures and illegal fishing will most certainly have a deleterious impact on fishing activities, ecosystems and biodiversity in Kerkennah. In a document prepared for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), this issue has been highlighted, raising the possibility that the artisanal mode of fishing in the islands (*charfia*) will be constrained. There are even reports of offshore fracking, which are cause for concern.

Climate change and the ills of neoliberalism

In a neoliberal economy like Tunisia’s, where the economy is subordinated to the rule of the market, generating inequality, privatising public wealth and failing to create decent jobs, typical features of precariousness and instability are likely to be exacerbated by disruptive climate change, accelerating already existing crises. Climate change acts as a ‘threat multiplier’ for current

problems. A 2007 report from a Pentagon-connected think-tank, CNA Corporation, formulates it clearly (although the ostensible aim of the report, to produce a justification for further militarisation, is alarming):

‘Many governments in the region are on edge in terms of their ability to provide basic needs: food, water, shelter and stability. Climate change will exacerbate the problems in these regions and add to the problems of effective governance ... Economic and environmental conditions in these already fragile areas will further erode as food production declines, diseases increase, clean water becomes increasingly scarce, and populations migrate in search of resources.’

Moreover, neoliberal capitalism impacts the way societies react to and address challenges. Christian Parenti argued in his book *Tropic of Chaos: Climate Change and the New Geography of Violence* that decades of neoliberal pathologies (in addition to Cold War-era militarism) have ‘distorted the state’s relationship to society – removing and undermining the state’s collectivist, regulatory and redistributive functions, while overdeveloping its repressive and military capacities’. This, he argues, inhibits society’s ability to avoid violent dislocations as climate change kicks in.

Parenti used the concept of ‘catastrophic convergence’ to talk about the collision of political, economic and environmental disasters that compound and amplify each other. In this respect, the current and impending dislocations of climate change in Kerkennah, and Tunisia in general, intersect with the already existing crises of poverty and neoliberal violence. And, given the securitised and militarised response to the threat of ‘terrorism’, it is not hard to imagine that adaptation to climate change will be militarised, securitised to protect the powerful and the interests of the rich.

Moreover, in an era of disaster capitalism (to use Naomi Klein’s expression), the climate chaos that might lead to the sinking of the Kerkennah archipelago could be seen as an opportunity for more dispossession and more profit-making.

sion and more profit-making.

Achieving environmental and climate justice

Recovering sovereignty over natural resources and breaking away from the clutches of market mechanisms are indispensable steps in the effort to mitigate and adapt to climate change. This is particularly true if the aim is climate justice, where the focus is on minimising the burden placed by climate change on the marginalised, dispossessed and vulnerable.

Gaining democratic control over these resources is another vital step in the march towards a just transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy. After all, how can such important decisions on the nature, structure and purpose of our energy systems be taken without the input of the people?

Yet democratic, ecological and redistributive control over our energy sources cannot happen so long as oil and gas multinationals control the lion’s share of our resources as well as maintain considerable influence over future economic decisions. This cannot happen while multinationals and authoritarian states work in tandem to heartlessly accumulate capital in favour of a tiny minority at the expense of the majority.

Take, for example, the case of British Gas (BG), the largest gas producer in the country, which supplies approximately 60% of Tunisia’s domestic gas production through the Miskar and Hasdrubal operations. BG Tunisia holds a 100% interest in the Miskar gas field, 125 kilometres offshore in the Gulf of Gabès. Gas is processed at the Hannibal plant and supplied under a long-term contract to Tunisia’s state electricity and gas company at international market values and in hard currency. The result is that Tunisian gas is sold to Tunisians as if it were an imported commodity!

To paraphrase the eloquent words of the late Latin American writer Eduardo Galeano, it seems that ‘the ruling elite has no interest whatsoever

in determining whether patriotism might not prove more profitable than treason, and whether begging is really the only formula for international politics’.

Sovereignty is being mortgaged by the Tunisian ruling elite who accepted (and still do) the continuous looting of Tunisia’s natural resources, generating our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others.

The paradox of extractivism

Islands like those in Kerkennah are at the frontline of climate change as their survival is already threatened due to rising sea levels. The effects of climate change and the climate crisis are compounded by environmental degradation and the exhaustion of natural resources caused by a productivist model of development based on extractivism, a mechanism of neo-colonial plunder and appropriation.

This model is based on what David Harvey has called ‘accumulation by dispossession’, which is accompanied by the development of underdevelopment and socio-ecological violence. This is the paradox of extractivism under capitalism, where sacrifice zones are created in order to maintain the accumulation of capital. Kerkennah is just one example.

The Kerkenni people are forced to adapt to a situation they did not create and are at the mercy of powerful and corrupt polluters who hide behind the shield of state repression. In order for the local population to avoid becoming climate refugees and to regain control over their lives, environment, resources and destiny, the fossil fuel industry must be curtailed and made accountable. Continuing its destructive operations would be akin to issuing a death sentence for the islands. ♦

Hamza Hamouchene is a London-based Algerian campaigner, writer, researcher, and a founding member of Algeria Solidarity Campaign (ASC) and Environmental Justice North Africa (EJNA). This article is reproduced from the ROAR Magazine website (roarmag.org).

RIO+20 and BEYOND (Volume 1)

Reaffirming Sustainable Development Commitments

This is a compilation of Third World Network’s reports on the Rio+20 intergovernmental negotiation process as well as some broad analysis of the progress that has been made in implementing the original 1992 Rio Summit commitments on sustainable development. We highlight the fact that there has been weak implementation, with considerable regression on the agreed principles and commitments by developed countries. Though the 1992 Rio Principles were ultimately reaffirmed after considerable debate, unless the regression process is arrested and progress renewed, the future for the planet and its inhabitants will be a bleak one. In Volume 2 the



ISBN: 978-967-0747-06-4 214 pp

reports on the negotiations on Sustainable Development Goals, a major follow-up from Rio+20, are compiled.

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Dhaka could be underwater in a decade

Experts have warned that the Bangladeshi capital, which already faces serious drainage and flooding problems, is in danger of going under within a decade if major remedial measures are not taken to prepare for the increased precipitation stemming from climate change.

Rafiqul Islam

LIKE many other fast-growing megacities, the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka faces severe water and sanitation problems, chiefly the annual flooding during monsoon season due to unplanned urbanisation, destruction of wetlands and poor city governance.

But experts are warning that if the authorities here don't take serious measures to address these issues soon, within a decade, every major thoroughfare in the city will be inundated and a majority of neighbourhoods will end up underwater after heavy precipitation.

'If the present trend of city governance continues, all city streets will be flooded during monsoon in a decade, intensifying the suffering of city dwellers, and people will be compelled to leave the city,' urban planner Dr Maksudur Rahman told Inter Press Service (IPS).

He predicted that about 50-60% of the city will be inundated in 10 years if it experiences even a moderate rainfall.

Climate change means even heavier rains

Dhaka is home to about 14 million people and is the centre of the country's growth, but it has practically zero capacity to cope with moderate to heavy rains. On 1 September 2015, for example, a total of 42 millimetres fell in an hour and a half, collapsing the city's drainage system.

According to experts, a 42 mm rainfall in 90 minutes is not unusual



Fahad Kaiser/IPS

Dhaka is home to about 14 million people and is the centre of Bangladesh's growth, but it has practically zero capacity to cope with moderate to heavy rains.

for monsoon season, but the city will face far worse in the future due to expected global temperature increases.

The fifth report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that more rainfall will be very likely at higher latitudes by the mid-21st century under a high-emissions scenario and over southern areas of Asia by the late 21st century.

More frequent and heavy rainfall days are projected over parts of South Asia, including Bangladesh.

Dhaka is also the second most vulnerable to coastal flooding among nine of the most-at-risk cities of the world, according to the Coastal City Flood Vulnerability Index (CCFVI), developed jointly by Dutch researchers and the University of Leeds in 2012.

Dhaka has four surrounding rivers – Buriganga, Turag, Balu and

Shitlakhya – which help drain the city during monsoon. The rivers are connected to the transboundary Jamuna River and Meghna River. But the natural flow of the capital's surrounding rivers is hampered during monsoon due to widespread encroachment, accelerating water problems.

SM Mahbubur Rahman, director of the Dhaka-based Institute of Water Modelling (IWM), a think-tank, said the authorities need to flush out the stagnant water caused by heavy rains through pumping since the rise in water level of the rivers during monsoon is a common phenomenon.

'When the intensity of rainfall is very high in a short period, they fail to do so,' he added.

Sylhet is the best example of managing problems in Bangladesh, as the city has successfully coped with its waterlogging in recent years through improvement of its drainage

system. Sylhet is located in a monsoon climatic zone and experiences a high intensity of rainfall during monsoon each year. Nearly 80% of the annual average precipitation (3,334 mm) occurs in the city between May and September.

Just a few years ago, waterlogging was a common phenomenon in the city during monsoon. But a seemingly magical change has come in managing water problems after Sylhet City Corporation improved its drainage system and re-excavated canals, which carry rainwater and keep the city free from waterlogging.

A critical network of canals

City canals play a vital role in running off rainwater during the rainy season. But most of the canals are clogged and the city drainage system is usually blocked because of disposal of waste in drains. So many parts of the capital get inundated due to the crumbling drainage system and some places go under several feet of stagnant rainwater during monsoon.

‘Once there were 56 canals in the capital, which carried rainwater and kept the city free from waterlogging ... most of the canals were filled up illegally,’ said Dr Maksudur, a professor in the Department of Geography and Environment at Dhaka University.

He stressed the need for cleaning up all the city canals and making them interconnected, as well as dredging the surrounding rivers to ensure smooth runoff of rainwater during monsoon.

In October 2013, the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWASA) signed a 7.5-million-euro deal with the Netherlands-based Vitens Evides International to dredge some of the canals, but three years later, there is no visible progress.

DWASA deputy managing director SDM Quamrul Alam Chowdhury said the Urban Dredging Demonstration Project (UDDP) is a partnership programme to reduce flooding in the city’s urban areas and improve the capacity of DWASA to carry out the drainage operation.



City canals play a vital role in running off rainwater during the rainy season but most of Dhaka’s canals are clogged up by dumped waste.

‘Under the UDDP, we are excavating Kalyanpur Khal [canal] in the city. We will also dig Segunbagicha Khal of the city,’ he added.

Dwindling water bodies

Water bodies have historically played an important role in the expansion of Dhaka. But as development encroaches on natural drainage systems, they no longer provide this critical ecosystem service.

‘We are indiscriminately filling up wetlands and low-lying areas in and around Dhaka city for settlement. So rainwater does not get space to run off,’ said Dr Maksudur.

A study by the Center for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) in 2011 shows that about 33% of Dhaka’s water bodies dwindled during 1960-2009 while low-lying areas declined by about 53%.

Lack of coordination

There are a number of government bodies, including DWASA, both Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC) and Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) and the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), that are responsible for ensuring a

proper drainage system in the capital. But a lack of coordination has led to a blame game over which agency is in charge.

DWASA spokesman Zakaria Al Mahmud said: ‘You will not find such Water Supply and Sewerage Authority across the world, which maintains the drainage system of a city, but DWASA maintains 20% of city’s drainage system.’

He said it is the responsibility of other government agencies like city corporations and BWDB to maintain the drainage system of Dhaka.

DSCC mayor Sayeed Khokon said it will take time to resolve the existing waterlogging problem, and blamed encroachers for filling up almost all the city canals.

Around 14 organisations are involved in maintaining the drainage system of the city, he said, adding that lack of coordination among them is the main reason behind the waterlogging.

DNCC mayor Annisul Huq suggested constituting a taskforce involving DWASA, city corporations, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK) and other government agencies to increase coordination among them aiming to resolve the city’s water problems. – IPS

Climate change's iniquitous transmission of urgency: The US Gulf South

No other region of the US has been more vulnerable to the devastating impacts of climate change than the Gulf Coast, where some of the country's 'poorest of the poor' live in conditions akin to those in the Global South, says *Anthony Karefa Rogers-Wright*.

THE 'South', both as a global region and within industrialised countries, is where the people most vulnerable to climate catastrophe are located. It is here that we find the highest concentration of fossil fuel sacrifice zones, home to low-wealth citizens who enjoy little to no access to political power in their respective nations. And it's here that we find some of the more efficacious models of climate resistance and resilience that you've never, or barely, heard about.

But in the context of the climate theatre, the concept of 'South' has ceased to just refer to geography. Globally and locally, it also refers to a set of attributes that engender and maintain a 'southern condition'. In the US, the concept applies to marginalised communities in cities as far to the north as New York City and Detroit as much as it does to New Orleans. It applies to any frontline community that has been the victim of Big Green's 'parachute effect' – co-opted, appropriated and left to fend for itself once the media attention dissipates and theirs is no longer the in-vogue struggle.

The communities situated throughout the US Gulf Coast epitomise the southern condition. Here are people whose standard of living and quality of life are not congruent with the wealth commanded by the nation that presides over them. There are many reasons why the southern condition persists in the United States and around the world, but one of the main culprits is the lack of media coverage these communities receive to portray their struggle against climate disruption. This iniquitous transmission of

urgency produces real, lasting effects that encourage our movement to view climate disruption through a hierarchical rather than an intersectional lens.

America's favourite sacrifice zone?

As the pre-eminent environmental justice scholar and practitioner Robert Bullard reminds us, frontline, low-wealth communities of colour are hit 'first and worst' by the impacts of climate change. Unfortunately, the response of our government to this disparity is 'last and passed'. In their seminal work, *The Wrong Complexion for Protection*, Beverly Wright and Robert Bullard remind us that 'Environmental and public health threats from natural and human-made disasters are not randomly distributed. Healthy places and healthy people are highly correlated. It should be no surprise that the poorest of the poor within the United States have the worst health and live in the most degraded and at-risk environments.' No US region is experiencing this reality more profoundly than the Gulf South, and no entity is creating this calamitous condition more than the fossil fuel industry.

Right now, the US Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) is considering five-year leases that will allow big oil companies to access designated areas in the Arctic and the Gulf for deepwater drilling. While there has been much discussion of the implications of this plan for polar bears in the Arctic, including letters from Democratic Senators to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and calls from

mainstream environmental groups, there has been far less attention paid to the implications for the Gulf Coast, with its low-wealth Black and Brown people – despite the fact that of the 13 potential leases 10 are in the Gulf, and only three are in the Arctic.

This iniquitous transmission of urgency further demonstrates how the Gulf South remains one of the preferred sacrifice zones of the United States. And it further shows why we must, as a global community, cease thinking about climate change solely as a nefarious natural phenomenon. Climate change is also a system of oppression that forms the intersection of racial, economic, gender, and Indigenous and ethnic injustice. Hence, the climate crisis requires an intersectional response: you cannot deal with climate disruption without addressing the disruption of all forms of justice.

The Gulf Coast includes the nexus of Cancer Alley (a stretch of toxic industrial operations along the Mississippi), sinking land, and the denial of federal recognition and respect for sovereign Indigenous nations and their territory. It also is home to the first US climate migrants, the Biloxi-Chitimacha-Choctaw tribe, which has lost 98% of its land to the encroaching Gulf waters due largely to extraction drilling operations – and all the while, it remains one of the most impoverished regions in the country despite the promise of good-paying oil jobs.

These are all variables of climate change's oppressive equation in the Gulf and in vulnerable places nationwide, including Native communities. And in her 'open letter demanding

respect and solidarity', Gulf Coast activist Jayeesha Dutta adroitly communicates why this imperilled region refuses to be taken for granted any longer by government and mainstream environmental groups alike.

It's imperative to distinguish between acknowledging climate change and acting on climate change. This discrepancy was put on full display last year during the UN climate summit in Paris, known as COP 21. My organisation, Environmental Action, was honoured to assist students and faculty from the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) Climate Change Initiative in participating at COP 21. We believe it was important to give the stories of the Gulf Coast a global platform in Paris, and many of the HBCU students are themselves residents of the region.

But while his administration was offering its narrative to the world, back home President Barack Obama and fellow Democrats were negotiating lifting the crude oil export ban, which had been in place since the 1970s. The HBCU students made impassioned pleas via video messages to Democratic Senators declaring 'The Ban Must Stand', but to no avail. This communicated to us and, I believe, the entire Gulf Coast that the President and Democrats' calls to address climate change are meretricious, if not vacuous. We knew that lifting the ban would lead to more offshore drilling in the Gulf of Mexico.

There's no monopoly on climate denial

As that episode reminds us, climate denial is not limited to Republican bogeymen like Senators James Inhofe and Ted Cruz. By allowing the crude oil export ban to be lifted, and considering an increase in offshore drilling, Democrats too are denying the science of climate change – the science telling us we must keep 80% of remaining fossil fuel deposits in the ground. Our friends from Oil Change International and Greenpeace inform us the proposed five-year offshore

leasing programme would lead to increased emissions of 850 million metric tons of carbon dioxide over roughly 50 years, the equivalent of the emissions from 3.6 million cars on the road over that same time period.

It was Frederick Douglass who said, 'Where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced, where ignorance prevails, and where any one class is made to feel that society is an organised conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe.' There are no better words to describe the situation in the Gulf Coast. This is why we are seeing so many take to direct action, risking their freedom, their safety and their lives to disrupt, divest from and abolish fossil fuels with the same fervour that drove Douglass and his allies in the movement to end slavery. And it's why author and journalist Wen Stephenson has described climate activists as 'the new abolitionists'.

The only way forward

Climate change has pillaged time from all of us, including our time to act. There is no more time for half-measures, perfunctory proclamations or policies derived from incrementalism. Climate disruption is a radical system that requires radical action. The Gulf Coast cannot afford another BP blowout or another Shell oil spill, and the people will no longer allow themselves to be captive to a circumference of injustice that continues to rob them of clean air, land, public health and economic democracy. And until we cease offshore drilling in the Gulf and the Arctic, the prescient words of Mr Douglass will be vindicated as communities, regions, nations and the entire planet face a climate reality that is bereft of safety.

There is only one choice moving forward. Offshore drilling must be replaced with offshore wind, thereby powering a just transition away from the fossil fuel economy. The fossil fuel empire and its political puppets can no longer use the excuse that re-

newable energy production is too expensive. Even Bloomberg News recently concluded that 'the costs of wind and solar power are falling too quickly for gas ever to dominate on a global scale.' As such, the only things keeping us from a revolutionary shift to green energy are a lack of political will and abject avarice. These are the sentiments I recently communicated while testifying to the Democratic National Committee's party platform committee.

As a movement, we must do better to ensure we are giving equal transmission to local and regional frontline struggles. We cannot allow the mainstream wing of our movement to pick winning and losing struggles, and decide which ones to fund and support in an effort to appease corporate interests – especially because those interests are often antithetical to the interests of communities and people on the ground.

In her latest work, *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle*, the revolutionary Angela Davis suggests that 'the question of how to bring movements together is also a question of the kind of language one uses and the consciousness one tries to impart. I think it's important to insist on the intersectionality of movements.' Davis, as always, is spot on – and it will take a massive paradigm shift in line with that idea to ensure that struggles from the Gulf Coast to the Pacific Northwest to North Dakota are afforded equal communication, funding and other forms of support as it pertains to the urgency of their struggles, which should also be seen as our collective struggle. ♦

Anthony Karefa Rogers-Wright is an activist and Policy Director for the US non-profit, Environmental Action. He has presented the case for climate justice, environmental justice and climate change action at universities nation- and worldwide and written on the subjects for various publications. Anthony was named one of Grist's '50 People You'll Be Talking About in 2016'. His most important client is his 11-month-old son, Zahir Cielo, and he currently resides in Seattle, Washington. The above article is reproduced from The Leap: System Change on a Deadline blog (theleapblog.org).

Authors are part of the climate change problem

By catering to an affluent set cut off from the reality of the poor, the South Asian literary community hides the true costs of climate change.

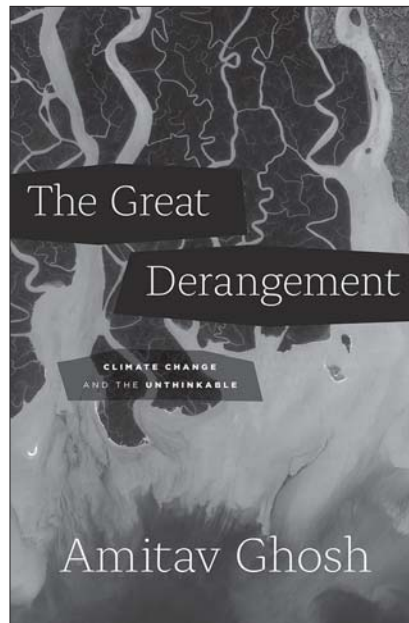
Omais Ahmad

IN Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*, the author has asked why one of the major issues of our time – climate change – has been neglected by the literary community. In South Asia the answer is easy to see. By catering to an urban, prosperous and global community, authors and publishers produce books that allow us to ignore the damage taking place in the lives of the marginalised. The literary community is not innocently unaware, but actively complicit in a process that allows us to ignore the damage that climate change is doing to the lives of the poor.

The poor pay the costs of climate change

Let us be clear as to what 'the problem' is. Pollution is a classic example of market failure, where the true cost of a process is not captured in the price attached to it. The carbon dioxide generated by transport, deforestation to make way for roads, the costs of the plastic wrapping when it is disposed off, all these are not part of the price of the cherries imported from Australia that you pick up at a grocery store.

These are what economists call 'externalities' – costs or benefits paid by somebody who did not choose to be part of the transaction. And somebody does pay the cost of these externalities, whether it is a beautiful village in Sikkim threatened by a glacial lake or an influx of mosquitoes, or villagers in West Bengal suffering from arsenic poisoning. Frankly, you do not even have to go so far. The



Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement* asks why climate change, one of the major issues of our time, has been neglected by the literary community.

heatwaves which become more extreme every year claim the lives of people living in the cities of South Asia all the time.

The striking similarity among all who pay the costs of these problems is that they are the poor, the people living in villages and the outer periphery. They are the marginal people of the countries – precisely the people who much of the literary community is not only divorced from but actively running away from. This is true across Asia, with very few books even touching on the subject of water.

The production of literature is measured by three main things: numbers of books sold, awards, and recognition both locally and globally through speaking activities at book festivals and the like. All of these, in one form or another, exclude the par-

ticipation of the very people most affected by climate change.

The myth of an aspirational readership

Working at one of India's most widely read news magazines, I would often be frustrated when my editor shot down a story idea by saying, 'This is not what our readers want.' In his mind, there was this mythical magazine reader who could afford to pay the 30 rupees for the weekly shot of news we provided. This reader was not interested in what happened to the small-town boys who became criminal dons in Bombay, nor in the lives of neglect most of India's sportsmen lived in, no matter how many awards they had won – unless they were cricketers, of course. These mythical readers were interested, though, in the new Rolls-Royce just launched in India, priced at about 40 million rupees, or just about \$1 million at that time, in 2007.

These mythical readers are also who the literary publishers cater to – aspirational, middle-class consumers who are far more interested in wasteful spending, even if only in their imagination, than in sustainable living. The grim challenges – or even small victories such as Chhewang Norphel's artificial glaciers in Ladakh or a technological breakthrough to create a new arsenic filter – related to climate change are not the stuff of novels that publishers feel will sell. It may be that they are right, but if these stories are not commissioned, if they are not published and promoted, how will we ever cultivate the authors who can tease out the complexities of life in this increasingly fragile environment?



Those who suffer the impacts of climate change, like drought, are the poor, the people living in villages and the outer periphery – ‘precisely the people who much of the literary community is not only divorced from but actively running away from’.

The problem with literary awards

Beyond publication are the literary awards, and the major problem with these is that there are hardly any important ones in small countries. The ‘big names’ of Indian fiction (and many of these are Indian only in origin, not by citizenship) – whether they are Salman Rushdie, VS Naipaul, Arundhati Roy, Aravind Adiga, Jhumpa Lahiri or Amitav Ghosh himself – have largely won awards outside the country. It is hard enough to translate the difference between the poor or the rural and the rich and urban within India; to make the jump and be able to explain these issues to a ‘global’ audience is nigh on impossible. It is little surprise that Naipaul is unable to explain, or even comprehend, the rural areas he describes in his *Area of Darkness*. Adiga’s Booker Prize-winning *The White Tiger* does not even try, and calls the village from which the protagonist fled merely ‘the darkness’.

Roy’s and Ghosh’s books have local dynamics. In particular, Ghosh’s earlier books such as *The Calcutta Chromosome*, *The Shadow Lines* and

The Hungry Tide may pave the way to highlighting the value of local dynamics, but for most new writers, walking in the footsteps of the Literary Greats is to walk away, to the urban and the global. Cosseted in air-conditioned spaces which keep the rising heat at bay, they write for an audience similarly cosseted, and both ignore the slow tragedy unfolding outside.

Voices in the margins

The success of one type of fiction in directly addressing this issue – the ironic graphic novel *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* by Sarnath Banerjee – is the exception that proves the point. The tongue-in-cheek telling of a Delhi scarred by ‘water wars’, as the capital of India dries out and various middle-class and upper-middle-class housing colonies face off in combat, works because of how ludicrous it seems. The real-life residents of these colonies do not have to look for water. They can imagine a scenario of travelling kilometres for the precious liquid only as satire.

Another type of fiction, that undertaken in local languages, also

shows promise. The work of Mahashweta Devi, one of the great Bengali authors, has consistently looked at the issues involving tribal communities and the marginalised poor. But even this type of literature – often called ‘regional literature’ – is often urban in nature, hiding the true costs of climate change playing out in the dry fields and the floods that hit the rural areas the worst.

Literary festivals and problematic funders

There is the last refuge, that of book festivals and book launches, where authors meet a wider public

(often trying to merely sell or publicise their books). These are paradoxical spaces, as they are at the intersection of the privileged and (theoretically) all the people who want to attend. While it is possible that uncomfortable questions are raised at such venues, it is also clear that such events need funds. When they turn to the very companies and enterprises responsible for pollution and blatant destruction of habitat, it becomes hard to believe that the platform will criticise such practices. An ode to uninhibited consumption is unlikely to lead to stories of caution and restraint.

These structures incentivise the creation of a literature that discourages exploration of the issues of climate change. This can change – just as feminist literature, once a marginal subject, became a part of mainstream literature. But it will change only when we recognise the problems in terms not just of the choices that individuals make, but also of the incentive structures that help nudge literature in this direction. It is only then that we will be able to confront and change the terms of debate. ♦

This article is reproduced from The Third Pole (www.thethirdpole.net).

A lost opportunity

The recent referendum vote by the Colombian people to reject the painfully crafted peace deal to end the 52-year civil war between the government and the rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) sent shockwaves around the world. *Vijay Prashad* explains the background to this unexpected turn of events.



A woman crying as she speaks on the mobile phone after hearing the result of the 2 October referendum, which rejected the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC rebels.

YEARS of negotiation in Havana, Cuba, brought the government of Colombia to a peace deal with the rebels of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). A 52-year civil war tore through this northernmost country of South America, taking at least a quarter of a million lives and displacing over six million people. No one was immune from the violence. Families had someone who had either been killed in the fighting or who wore the colours of the army, the FARC or the right-wing para-militaries. 'In this house everything is ruin,' wrote the poet María Mercedes Carranza. 'In this house we are burned alive.'

On 26 September, the government and the FARC rebels signed an agreement based on the negotiations in Havana to end the war. The landmark accord would bring the FARC fighters out of the forest and into the political process. Crimes committed

during the war – by all sides – would be forgiven in the name of peace. The government promised to set aside three million hectares to distribute to landless peasants and small landholders. The FARC would receive funds to help it become a political party, and the government promised to reserve seats in the Congress for it.

To ratify this agreement, the government agreed to hold a referendum on 2 October. Few expected the turnout to be as low as it was – under 40%, fewer than the percentage that came to the polls in 2014 to elect Colombia's current President, Juan Manuel Santos – and for the vote to go against the peace agreement. The outcome was very close: 50.23% voted no, and 49.76% voted yes.

Split wide open

Polls had indicated that the 'yes' vote would win easily. The govern-

ment, the FARC, the Catholic church and most civil society organisations backed the 'yes' vote. President Santos said he had bargained for the best deal possible.

The President had been the Defence Minister under the previous President, Álvaro Uribe, and had helped prosecute the war against the FARC and other guerilla groups. Both Santos and Uribe knew about the crimes committed by their military. In 2008, Uribe dismissed 25 military officers, including three generals, for the assassination of young people who had been recruited in Bogotá's slums. These officers had been trained at the US Army's School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the troops had been armed under the US programme called Plan Colombia. Hundreds of extrajudicial killings had been admitted by Santos when he was Defence Minister. Reports emerged that the government had dispossessed, often at the barrel of a gun, mainly Afro-Colombians from the interior in order to facilitate the palm oil sector. This 'ethnic cleansing' had become normal from the government's side.

In the lead-up to the referendum, the FARC leadership travelled across the country to apologise for crimes that their fighters had committed, massacres that they agreed had been unnecessary on political and military grounds. For instance, the FARC commander Ivan Marquez pointed to the 2002 Bojaya massacre of 119 civilians (48 of them children) and offered 'an infinite apology'. This was one of many such incidents.

Uribe, now a Senator, campaigned viciously against the deal. He argued against allowing the FARC impunity for such massacres and

mused about dealing a death blow by military means against the guerilla group. His party and his allies suggested that the peace deal would deliver Colombia to the communists and to those who supported a progressive social agenda, including gay rights.

In Uribe's hometown of Medellin, the leader of the 'no' campaign was Jhon Jairo Velásquez, the hitman of the late drug kingpin Pablo Escobar. These were the kinds of people who canvassed against the deal. It was a dirty campaign, vilifying President Santos for his 'betrayal' and calling the FARC 'narco-terrorists' who needed to be eliminated. Anger that the deal had been negotiated seemingly without democratic oversight was fodder for some who instinctively would have recoiled against bringing the FARC above ground. Human Rights Watch's Americas Director José Miguel Vivanco suggested that the deal should be disregarded because it gave immunity to the FARC rebels. This was the context that moved a slim majority to vote against the accord.

Colombian activists who supported the deal say that the turnout was low for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most significant reason is the lack of enthusiasm about the peace agreement in the first place. Hurricane Matthew's rush to the Colombian coastline certainly played a role in dampening turnout on the coast, where the 'yes' vote would have been strengthened. Places which had experienced the worst of the war – in the interior of the country – voted heavily for the agreement, while Medellin voted 'no'. The town of Bojaya voted overwhelmingly (95.76%) for the agreement. They knew what the vote would mean.

Peace or war?

When the referendum's result broke, Uribe took to the airwaves with a more conciliatory tone. He knew that he had found a seat at the table. No longer was his tone towards the FARC harsh. 'We ask that there is no violence,' said the Senator, 'that the

Human Rights Watch head appeals for more war in Colombia

THE executive director of US-based Human Rights Watch is under fire from the Twittersphere after seemingly calling for the war in Colombia to continue.

'Colombia had stronger army, growing economy. FARC non-drug support diminishing. So why give no-jail sweetheart deal?' Kenneth Roth tweeted on 3 October.

While its stated purpose is 'to defend and protect human rights', Human Rights Watch opposed the peace agreement to end the longest-running war on the continent. The peace treaty, negotiated in Havana between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) rebels, was narrowly rejected by Colombians in a sparsely attended plebiscite on 2 October.

The 'No' campaign was headed by right-wing former president Alvaro Uribe, who has been accused of having ties to the notoriously violent paramilitary groups. Uribe and 'No' campaigners opposed provisions that would grant amnesty for certain crimes committed during the war, as well as political participation of the rebels once they demobilised.

Critics say Human Rights Watch has a questionable record when it comes to Latin America, including a history of opposing left governments in the region. Back in 2012, Roth used his Twitter account to attack several ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) bloc governments, calling them 'the most abusive in Latin America', referring to Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. ♦

This article is reproduced from the teleSUR English website (www.telesurtv.net/english).

FARC are protected and that they cease all crime, including drug trafficking and extortion.' It was important for Uribe to make the point that the vote was not against peace or for war, but that it was for a different kind of peace. He appears statesmanlike, even though his agenda is narrow.

Both Santos and the FARC signalled quickly that the vote would not lead them back to war. The FARC's leader Rodrigo Londoño Echeverri, aka Timochenko, said that 'peace would triumph'. He pledged that the FARC would 'maintain its desire for peace' and would use 'words as arms to build the future'. Santos called for an all-party discussion towards restarting the negotiation.

Uribe will play an oversize role in the new deliberations. He will seek to get more concessions from the FARC. Fighters of the FARC have been eager for the peace process to come into play. They are exhausted

by the fighting and had wanted to return home. The morale of the FARC is low, but that does not mean that it would be willing to concede on questions of prosecution for its leadership and fighters.

Gloom prevails across the country. If the vote had gone the other way, Colombia might have shown the world that even intractable civil wars can come to an end. It would have been a message to Syria and to the Congo, a message of the power of negotiation towards a new civic compact. But this did not come to pass. Even as President Santos and the FARC leadership try to maintain their optimism of a deal, the return of Uribe suggests that Colombia might turn its back on a real peace. ♦

Vijay Prashad teaches International Studies at Trinity College in the US. He is the Chief Editor of LeftWord Books. This article was first published in The Hindu (5 October 2016).

Colombia's 'no' vote does not mean peace is impossible

In the following article, *Adam Isacson* explains that while the referendum outcome presents Colombia with a grim list of potential consequences, a resumption of the war is not inevitable.



Colombians voting in the 2 October referendum. The result confounded pollsters' predictions and leaves the country wondering what comes next.

'THE horrible night has ceased,' a tearful Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos said on 26 September, quoting a line from his country's national anthem. He was speaking before an audience of world leaders – the UN Secretary-General, several Latin American presidents, the US Secretary of State – at a joyful ceremony in the Caribbean port of Cartagena, where he and leaders of the FARC guerilla group signed an accord to end a 52-year-old war.

A week later, it looks like the 'horrible night' will go on for at least a bit longer. By a razor-thin margin, Colombians voted on 2 October to reject the peace accord. The result confounded pollsters' predictions and leaves the South American country wondering what comes next.

That is impossible to predict: during the plebiscite campaign, the government made clear that it had no 'Plan B' if the accord was rejected. President Santos's brief concession speech on the evening of 2 October made clear that no plan exists.

A return to war is not inevitable. The FARC's leadership says it will continue to seek peace. The leading proponents of the 'no' vote, especially former President Álvaro Uribe, say they want dialogue with the Santos

government on a 'better' accord. Still, in the new post-plebiscite reality, those who seek war are more likely to get it.

In the best-case scenario, the parties will agree quickly on a new agenda, taking into account the concerns of Colombia's political right, with a clear timetable. They will move determinedly in a process that revises the accords in a matter of weeks.

A sobering list of consequences

If this does not happen, however – in even a 'medium-case' scenario in which the negotiations don't collapse but suffer delays or a sense of drift – Colombia faces a grim list of negative outcomes:

- The FARC is not going to spend the week following the plebiscite concentrating its forces into 26 zones around the country to start an agreed-upon six-month, UN-verified disarmament process. This plan was just getting underway, with the FARC declaring its troop strength, its weapons stockpiles and its assets. However, with the accord laying out that procedure now invalidated, the disarmament timetable is frozen.

- Even if the FARC wishes to

undergo this process anyway, it cannot do so, as its members are all technically fugitives. A ceasefire between the government and the FARC, which is still in force, suspends arrest warrants for guerillas. However, it can be lifted at any time, so the FARC's members do not have legal guarantees.

- Without verification or concentration, and without a clear direction for the talks' future, the ceasefire – which has reduced armed conflict-related violence to mid-1960s levels – may become unstable, especially if efforts to arrive at a new accord drag on. The UN, following two Security Council resolutions, has set up a monitoring and verification mechanism, with over 200 international observers ready to begin work immediately. Now, with no accord to implement, the UN mission's present role and immediate future are unclear.

- Peace talks with the smaller ELN guerilla group, which were already adrift, are not likely to see a formal start in the near future. The Colombian electorate's delegitimisation of the FARC agreement strengthens hardliners within the ELN leadership who are wary of peace talks.

- A prolonged state of 'limbo' may cause a deterioration of FARC command and control over guerillas in the field. Even if commanders in Havana remain committed to renegotiating, the number of fighters whom they can 'deliver' for demobilisation may drop as time passes. Fighters who would have demobilised may begin carrying out hostilities on their own, or forming or joining new criminal groups.

- Efforts to implement a new strategy for reducing coca cultivation, as foreseen in the accord, will be de-

layed, while coca planting continues expanding rapidly around the country.

- The White House's proposed 'Peace Colombia' aid package may suffer a deep cut. It was approved by both houses of the US Congress, but the 2017 foreign assistance budget law has not yet been reconciled, and may be rewritten after the US presidential elections. The lack of a peace accord to implement may cause the \$450 million appropriation for Colombia to fall back to its 2016 level of about \$320 million. Meanwhile, other international donors may similarly redirect foreign aid funds to urgent needs elsewhere in the world, such as the Syrian refugee crisis.

A shift to surrender negotiations?

Did Colombian voters know about these risks before they voted 'no' (or in the case of 63% of voters, failed to vote at all) on 2 October? Some did: a minority believe that the solution lies on the battlefield, and that the negotiations were premature. But many others believed that their 'no' vote was a vote for a better peace accord.

Opponents said that voting 'no' would force the government and guerrillas to renegotiate a pact with stronger punishments for guerrillas and soldiers guilty of war crimes. If such talks proceed in Havana, they will push for prison time for FARC leaders (perhaps similar to the five to eight years given to paramilitary leaders after they demobilised in 2006), rather than the nebulous 'restriction of liberty' punishment laid out in the accord.

Opponents of the peace accord will also push to rescind the government's concession of 10 automatic congressional seats (five in the 102-person Senate and five in the 166-person House) for FARC members between 2018 and 2026. They also wish to reduce the ambitious scope of promised investments in rural development programmes, which ex-President Uribe insists Colombia can't afford.



Members of the FARC. The ceasefire between government forces and the FARC guerrillas may become unstable, especially if efforts to arrive at a new peace accord drag on.

A renegotiation that waters down these government concessions would result in an accord that looks more like terms of surrender. This is only possible if Colombia's government is in a position to demand surrender. That is far from clear. For Colombians in urban areas, who have not strongly felt the conflict's impact in years, perhaps a surrender negotiation seems like the way to go. But consider:

- In the 12 years between Plan Colombia's 2000 launch and the peace talks' 2012 inauguration, the conflict killed nearly 25,000 Colombians in combat, plus a similar number of civilians. The result was a two-thirds weakening of the FARC, from about 20,000 to about 6,000-7,000 members.

- Would it take a similar effort to weaken the FARC by another two-thirds, which would render them about as strong as the smaller ELN group is today? (Recall that peace talks with the ELN still haven't started.)

- Even with this correlation of forces, it took negotiators four long, uninterrupted, intense years of formal talks to achieve the accord that was rejected on 2 October. Of those four years, 19 months were spent negotiating the part of the accord that deals with war crimes.

These are not characteristics of surrender negotiations. The FARC has no chance of taking power on the battlefield. But it still has wealth and the capacity to carry out hostilities in many regions throughout Colombia. A renegotiation on tougher terms is not a certainty. (Chief government

negotiator Humberto de la Calle, who tendered his resignation the morning of 3 October, seems to recognise this.)

Needed now: clarity and momentum

The way forward is not clear. But it needs to become clear soon. A situation of drift and crisis is unsustainable, and could lead to an outcome that the vast majority of Colombians do not want: either a collapse of the talks and a return to war, or a disintegration of the FARC into structures that would be impossible to demobilise.

As soon as possible, renewed talks need an agenda, possibly a timetable, and a sense of what is achievable.

The US government's role is not central here, but it is still important. The administration and Congress must send clear signals that they continue to support President Santos's negotiation effort, and that they desire a quick resumption of talks with a new and achievable agenda. It is at crucial moments like these that the flexible, supportive role of Special Envoy Bernie Aronson is most important. To the extent that diplomatic efforts can help get things back on track, Washington should spare none. ♦

Adam Isacson is Senior Associate for Regional Security Policy at WOLA (Washington Office on Latin America), a research and advocacy organisation advancing human rights in the Americas. He was on the ground in Colombia during the plebiscite, monitoring voting with the Carter Center. The above article is reproduced from the WOLA website (www.wola.org).

Non-Aligned Movement holds summit as global crisis worsens

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held its 17th summit in Venezuela in September. Acknowledging that it is the developing countries that are suffering from the current global turmoil 'caused mostly by the geopolitical interests of the great centres of power, as well as from protracted conflicts inherited from colonialism and neo-colonialism', the summit reaffirmed the Movement's opposition to unilateralism and militarism. *Abayomi Azikiwe* reports.

MARKING the 55th anniversary of its founding, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held its 17th summit on Margarita Island in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela on 17-18 September. This meeting was held under the theme of 'Peace, Sovereignty and Solidarity for Development'.

Margarita is the largest island in the Venezuelan state of Nueva Esparta, located off the northeastern coast of the South American country, in the Caribbean Sea. The capital city of Nueva Esparta, La Asunción, is located on the island. The economic life of the island is based on tourism, fishing and construction.

Over 120 nations were in attendance at the NAM summit, including many leading heads of state, meeting amid a growing economic and security crisis for oil- and commodity-producing regions. The host government of Venezuela has lost revenue due to the United States-induced overproduction of petroleum resources.

States such as Venezuela, Nigeria, Brazil, Angola, Ecuador and others are experiencing economic difficulties which in some cases have resulted in political instability. The United Socialist Party in Venezuela is facing profound challenges to its authority from an opposition coalition that is supported by the US.

In a declaration issued at the conclusion of the gathering, NAM said the nations and governments represented were: 'Mindful of the fact that the history and reality of the world in which we live ... today demonstrates that it is the developing countries of the world [which] suffer more in-



Leaders and representatives of over 120 nations were in attendance at the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Margarita Island, Venezuela.

tensely from the disregard of international law, from invasions, from the ravages of war and armed conflicts, caused mostly by the geopolitical interests of the great centres of power, as well as from protracted conflicts inherited from colonialism and neo-colonialism.'

This section of the declaration reflects the burgeoning crisis of internal and external displacement internationally. According to statistics released by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the degree of displacement has reached an unprecedented level. An estimated 65.3 million people around the globe have been forced away from their homes in recent years. Among these there are approximately 21.3 million refugees, over 50% of whom are under the age of 18.

A fact sheet published by UNHCR says: 'There are also 10 million stateless people who have been de-

nied a nationality and access to basic rights such as education, healthcare, employment and freedom of movement. In a world where nearly 34,000 people are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution, our work at UNHCR is more important than ever before.'

Many of these displaced people are fleeing the Pentagon- and NATO-instigated wars of conquest and regime change. In addition, the unsustainability of economic growth in many African, Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American states has prompted millions to seek employment in North America and Europe. The large influx of people from oppressed nations into the centres of world capitalism and their satellites has created social tensions that have manifested in electoral politics.

Right-wing governments and political parties have made substantial gains in the industrial states fueling institutional racism, intolerance

and violence. Concurrently these nations in Europe and North America are undergoing structural unemployment and a rise in the rates of poverty.

NAM pledges to continue legacy of founders

NAM grew out of the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955. This gathering of 29 countries was a response to the growing threat of world war during the period in the aftermath of World War II, characterised by the US intervention in the Korean Peninsula, the French defeat in Vietnam and the beginning of an armed struggle for national liberation in Algeria. These developments heightened the military and political conflict between the US and the Soviet Union which emerged as the major powers on the world scene.

Liberation struggles, anti-colonial movements and political parties sought to end colonialism and imperialism. The Soviet Union and later the People's Republic of China sought to ally their foreign policies with the aspirations of the peoples who were seeking to emerge from colonial and semi-colonial rule as well as those who had gained national independence.

By 1961, the need for a more permanent organisation came to the fore. In Belgrade, Yugoslavia – then a socialist federation under Marshal Tito – NAM was formed, with leading figures such as Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Sukarno of Indonesia as founding sponsors. The decolonisation process in Africa was well underway by 1960 and NAM sought to form a bloc of emerging states within the United Nations.

Over the last five-and-a-half decades, NAM has experienced its ebbs and flows. Leadership has been held by various nation-states including Cuba and Egypt. The Islamic Republic of Iran hosted the previous summit in Tehran in 2012. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, in his final report to the summit in Venezuela, emphasised: 'What unfolds in the contemporary international order is worrying if we adopt a realistic perspective. In today's global relations, he-



A Syrian refugee camp on the Turkish border. One section of the NAM summit declaration reflects the burgeoning crisis of displacement; it is estimated that there are some 21.3 million refugees worldwide.

gemonic and domineering inclinations are incontrovertible reality. Alignment towards military polarisations and blocks is another dominant feature in the mentality and behaviours of some of the players. Arms race, warmongering, intensification of conflicts and violence and interfering in the domestic affairs of developing nations by the holders of power and wealth, overtly or covertly, are only examples of such behaviour which cannot be interpreted unless with the logic of hegemony-seeking and predominance.' (*Iran Times*, 18 September)

Consequently, the declaration of the summit in Venezuela stressed 'the inalienable right of all peoples, including those of non-self-governing territories, as well as those of territories under foreign occupation or under colonial or foreign domination, to self-determination. In the case of peoples who are subject to foreign occupation and colonial or foreign domination, the exercise of self-determination remains valid and essential to securing the eradication of all those situations and ensuring the universal respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms.'

A myriad of issues were addressed at the NAM summit, including climate change, sustainable economic development, reform of the UN Security Council, human rights, unilateral sanctions, peacekeeping missions, religious tolerance, international solidarity, South-South cooperation, the role of youth, gender equality, the need for a new world

communications and information order, independence for Palestine, and the Western Sahara, among other pressing concerns.

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe called upon NAM to increase its cooperation in the face of greater threats by the former colonial and existing neo-colonial states. Zimbabwe for the last 15 years has been subjected to harsh economic sanctions by the imperialist governments in London, Washington and throughout the European Union.

Mugabe, who attended the summit en route to the UN General Assembly in New York, emphasised in his speech that: 'Poverty is a threat to international peace and security and the wellbeing of people who are at the centre of [the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development]. We should therefore continue to speak out against unilateral actions that undermine efforts to address poverty and underdevelopment. Zimbabwe and other Non-Aligned Movement members continue to be targets of unwarranted sanctions from powerful countries who seek to use economic might to impose their will on others. We are grateful for the steadfast support and solidarity from the movement, and expect sustained efforts to have these heinous sanctions lifted.' [*Sunday Mail* (Zimbabwe), 18 September] ♦

Abayomi Azikiwe is Editor of the Pan-African News Wire. This article is reproduced from Pambazuka News (Issue 791, www.pambazuka.org).

Obama's final Asian tour 'unpivots' US war crimes in the region

When President Obama recently visited Laos as part of his final Asian tour, he acknowledged that in the 1960s-70s 'secret war' the US had dropped more bombs on that small country than the combined total dropped on Germany and Japan during the Second World War. But as *Kalinga Seneviratne* points out, this first ever official acknowledgement was not even accompanied with an apology, still less an owning up to a war crime.

PRESIDENT Barack Obama's 'pivot to Asia' policy, which realigned the US relationship to Asia, is largely regarded favourably in this region. Yet, his farewell visit to Asia 'unpivoted' a darker side of US involvement in Asia – horrendous war crimes committed by the US in Laos in the 1960s and 1970s for which Washington is yet to be held accountable.

Laos, a tiny landlocked country in Southeast Asia inhabited by 6.9 million people, is one of the most heavily bombed countries in the world per capita following the Vietnam War. The dangerous unexploded ordnance (UXO) left behind is a sad legacy of the war that continues to be a threat to the lives of rural populations and a hindrance to the use of land for agriculture and development.

Between 1964 and 1973 a secret CIA-led operation to cut supplies to the National Liberation Front in South Vietnam resulted in two million tons of ordnance being dropped on Laos – more than the combined total dropped on both Japan and Germany during World War Two. This includes more than 270 million anti-personnel sub-munitions released from cluster bombs.

Speaking at the National Cultural Centre in Laos, while announcing a grant of \$90 million for landmine clearance operations in the country, President Obama came very close to apologising for his country's war crime.

'For those years in the 1960s and



A Buddhist monk poses next to unexploded bombs dropped in Laos by US planes during the Vietnam War. The dangerous unexploded ordnance left behind after the war continues to be a threat to the lives of rural populations.

70s America's intervention in Laos was a secret to the American people who were separated by vast distances and a Pacific Ocean – and there was no Internet and information didn't flow as easily,' he said, adding, 'for the people of Laos obviously this war was no secret.'

The money will be provided over the next three years and will be spent on surveying Laos for some 80 million unexploded cluster bombs dropped during the war. Obama told his audience that the US has an obligation to help Laos clear the munitions that remain in the ground after bombing raids that have devastated large parts of the country.

'Villages and entire valleys were obliterated. Ancient plains were devastated. Countless civilians were killed. That conflict was another reminder that whatever the cause, whatever our intentions, war inflicts a terrible toll, especially on innocent men, women and children,' Obama said,

stopping short of offering a formal apology for the US actions.

He added: 'Many of the bombs dropped never exploded. Over the years thousands of Lao people have been killed or injured, farmers tending fields, children playing. The wounds, a missing leg or arm, last a lifetime. That's why I've dramatically increased our funding to remove these unexploded bombs.'

As the *Vientiane Times* pointed out, about 580,000 secret bombing missions were carried out over Laos. A quarter of all villages in Laos are contaminated with UXO, the impact of which is particularly visible in many of the poorest districts.

Although the Indochina war ended more than three decades ago, the bombs killed and injured about 50,000 people as a result of UXO incidents between 1964 and 2008, with many being women and children.

Explaining the effect of the atrocious actions, Somsack Pongkhao

wrote in the *Vientiane Times*: ‘The bombs that remain continue to have a major impact on the safety and livelihoods of rural people, diminishing their ability to cultivate crops and killing and maiming those who take the risk of working contaminated land.’

‘Unexploded ordnance has a significant effect on social and economic development as a whole, increasing the cost of the construction of schools, hospitals and roads throughout Laos, due to the need to carry out clearance activities before work can begin.’

It is ironic that while the US administration goes around the world, often drafting the UN Human Rights Council and the International Court of Justice, to demand that countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East account for war crimes, it took it almost 60 years to acknowledge its heinous actions in Laos.

Yet, as former American war correspondent in Laos and Vietnam Robert Scheer argued in an interview with The Real News Network, Obama used his visit for a charm offensive rather than accounting for one of the most horrendous war crimes in history. ‘If you don’t take ownership for your own atrocities, you first of all have no authority to condemn atrocities anywhere in the world and you don’t learn the lessons of history,’ he argues.

‘It was one of the most brutal, uncivilised, vicious attacks on a people that we’ve seen in human history and the president is lying. It’s a bald-faced lie to say “Oh people couldn’t get the information because we didn’t have the Internet”,’ notes Scheer, who has witnessed, documented and reported the atrocities.

‘There were plenty of journalists. They couldn’t get mainstream media to cover the story in any effective way. But the most important thing was that the US government was very effective in lying about what it was doing.’

While these war crimes were well documented, Scheer notes that the US



US President Barack Obama tours a centre in Vientiane producing prosthetics for victims of unexploded ordnance. During his visit to Laos, Obama stopped short of apologising for his country’s war crime.

never took ownership or responsibility for what it did. It was only in 2012 that Hillary Clinton went there as Secretary of State.

‘This was a war against peasants. People who were using oxen to till their fields. Who barely knew what a pencil was, and you went to war with them to destroy them, to demoralise them, and it had nothing to do with them,’ says Scheer. ‘It had to do with China, it had to do with the Soviet Union, it had to do with some crazy ideas about the Cold War.’

By offering \$90 million to clear mines, Obama made it look like an altruistic gesture to the Laotian people, and the uncritical mainstream media assisted the process.

Even New Zealand, which was a US ally during the Vietnam War, chipped in. Prime Minister John Key, who also participated in the East Asia Summit in Vientiane that Obama attended, announced a grant of \$7.2 million to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s UXO clearing operations.

UNDP is headed by New Zealand’s former Prime Minister Helen Clark, who is also one of the candidates to succeed the outgoing Ban Ki-moon as UN Secretary-General.

‘New Zealand has a strong legacy of supporting UXO clearance around the world, including for the past 20 years in Laos, and this funding will make a real difference to the safety and economic prospects of the people here. We are proud to stand alongside the people and the govern-

ment of Laos to continue this important work,’ Key said at a ceremony at the UXO Training Centre in Laos.

But, no journalist present there asked him why New Zealand couldn’t stand with the Lao people 50 years ago to stop the US atrocities or whether they were part of the bombing campaign.

Former UNDP resident representative in Laos, Minh Pham, writing in Singapore’s *Straits Times*, called on the US to accelerate the detection and clearance of cluster bombs in Laos.

‘At the current rate of clearance, it will take a century for Laos to rid itself of the 2.7 million tonnes of cluster bombs that were dropped, 30 per cent of which did not explode and are imbedded in the ground,’ he warned.

Addressing Obama, Minh wrote: ‘Bombing people “back to the Stone Age” runs contrary to the “soft” or “smart” power you have advanced. Recognising this, along with the principle that the polluter pays, will go a long way to bridge the trust deficit.’

Minh said: ‘A smart move will be to introduce drone technology in the detection of the millions of tennis ball-sized bomblets scattered throughout the country; Laos currently uses handheld World War II-era technology.’

He added, ‘Clearing the UXO will lift the tax in perpetuity imposed by the presence of the bombs on the social and economic development of the country. And critically, it is not only a smart move, but also a moral obligation.’

Meanwhile, at a side-event to the 6-8 September ASEAN Summit in the Lao capital, Prime Minister Thongloun Sisoulith and UN Secretary-General Ban inaugurated Laos’s own national Sustainable Development Goal on UXO, which says: ‘Make lives safe from UXO; Remove the UXO obstacle to national development.’ – *IDN-InDepthNews/Lotus News Features* ◆

Shimon Peres: A tireless dove?

When Israeli leader Shimon Peres died in September, Western governments and media paid lavish tributes to him, hailing him as a tribune of peace. *Ben White* explodes this myth of Peres as a peacemaker.

SHIMON Peres, who passed away on 28 September aged 93 after suffering a stroke on 13 September, epitomised the disparity between Israel's image in the West and the reality of its bloody, colonial policies in Palestine and the wider region.

Peres was born in modern-day Belarus in 1923, and his family moved to Palestine in the 1930s. As a young man, Peres joined the Hagannah, the militia primarily responsible for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian villages in 1947-49, during the Nakba.

Despite the violent displacement of the Palestinians being a matter of historical record, Peres has always insisted that Zionist forces 'upheld the purity of arms' during the establishment of the state of Israel. Indeed, he even claimed that before Israel existed, 'there was nothing here'.

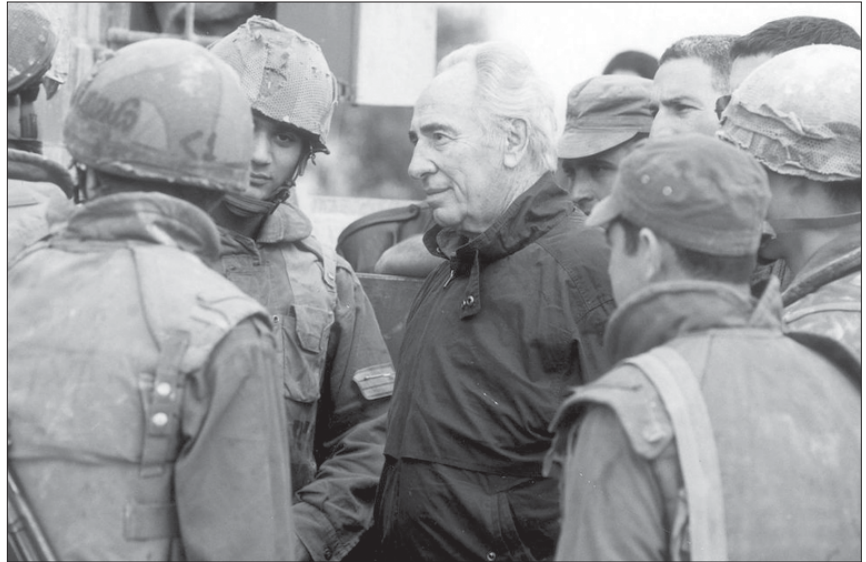
Over seven decades, Peres served as prime minister (twice) and president, though he never actually won a national election outright. He was a member of 12 cabinets and had stints as defence, foreign and finance minister.

He is perhaps best known in the West for his role in the negotiations that led to the 1993 Oslo Accords, which won him, along with Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, the Nobel Peace Prize.

Yet for Palestinians and their neighbours in the Middle East, Peres' track record is very different from his reputation in the West as a tireless 'dove'. The following is by no means a comprehensive summary of Peres' record in the service of colonialism and apartheid.

Nuclear weapons

Between 1953 and 1965, Peres served first as director general of Israel's defence ministry and then as



As Israeli prime minister in 1996, Shimon Peres ordered and oversaw 'Operation Grapes of Wrath', when Israeli armed forces killed some 154 civilians in Lebanon and injured another 351. Picture shows Peres speaking with soldiers taking part in the operation.

deputy defence minister. On account of his responsibilities at the time, Peres has been described as 'an architect of Israel's nuclear weapons programme', which, to this day, 'remains outside the scrutiny of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'.

In 1975, as secret minutes have since revealed, Peres met with South African Defence Minister PW Botha and 'offered to sell nuclear warheads to the apartheid regime'. In 1986, Peres authorised the Mossad operation that saw nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu kidnapped in Rome.

Targeting Palestinian citizens

Peres had a key role in the military regime imposed on Palestinian citizens until 1966, under which authorities carried out mass land theft and displacement.

One such tool was Article

125, which allowed Palestinian land to be declared a closed military zone. Its owners denied access, the land would then be confiscated as 'uncultivated'. Peres praised Article 125 as a means to 'directly continue the struggle for Jewish settlement and Jewish immigration'.

Another one of Peres' responsibilities in his capacity as director general of the defence ministry was to 'Judaize' the Galilee; that is to say, to pursue policies aimed at reducing the region's proportion of Palestinian citizens compared to Jewish ones.

In 2005, as vice premier in the cabinet of Ariel Sharon, Peres renewed his attack on Palestinian citizens with plans to encourage Jewish Israelis to move to the Galilee. His 'development' plan covered 104 communities – 100 of them Jewish.

In secret conversations with US officials that same year, Peres claimed Israel had 'lost one million dunams [1,000 square kilometres] of Negev

land to the Bedouin', adding that the 'development' of the Negev and Galilee could 'relieve what [he] termed a demographic threat'.

Supporting illegal settlements in the West Bank

While Israel's settlement project in the West Bank has come to be associated primarily with Likud and other right-wing nationalist parties, it was in fact the Labour party which kickstarted the colonisation of the newly conquered Palestinian territory – and Peres was an enthusiastic participant.

During Peres' tenure as defence minister, from 1974 to 1977, the Rabin government established a number of key West Bank settlements, including Ofra, large sections of which were built on confiscated privately-owned Palestinian land.

Having played a key role in the early days of the settlement enterprise, in more recent years, Peres has intervened to undermine any sort of measures, no matter how modest, to sanction the illegal colonies – always, of course, in the name of protecting 'peace negotiations'.

The Qana massacre

As prime minister in 1996, Peres ordered and oversaw 'Operation Grapes of Wrath', when Israeli armed forces killed some 154 civilians in Lebanon and injured another 351. The operation, widely believed to have been a pre-election show of strength, saw Lebanese civilians intentionally targeted.

According to the official Israeli Air Force website, the operation involved 'massive bombing of the Shia villages in South Lebanon in order to cause a flow of civilians north, toward Beirut, thus applying pressure on Syria and Lebanon to restrain Hezbollah'.

The campaign's most notorious incident was the Qana massacre, when Israel shelled a United Nations

compound and killed 106 sheltering civilians. A UN report stated that, contrary to Israeli denials, it was 'unlikely' that the shelling 'was the result of technical and/or procedural errors'.

Later, Israeli gunners told Israeli television that they had no regrets over the massacre, as the dead were 'just a bunch of Arabs'. As for Peres, his conscience was also clean: 'Everything was done according to clear logic and in a responsible way,' he said. 'I am at peace.'

Gaza – defending blockade and brutality

Peres came into his own as one of Israel's most important global ambassadors in the last 10 years, as the Gaza Strip was subjected to a devastating blockade and three major offensives. Despite global outrage at such policies, Peres has consistently backed collective punishment and military brutality.

In January 2009, for example, despite calls by 'Israeli human rights organisations ... for "Operation Cast Lead" to be halted', Peres described 'national solidarity behind the military operation' as 'Israel's finest hour'. According to Peres, the aim of the assault 'was to provide a strong blow to the people of Gaza so that they would lose their appetite for shooting at Israel'.

During 'Operation Pillar of Defence' in November 2012, Peres 'took on the job of helping the Israeli public relations effort, communicating the Israeli narrative to world leaders', in the words of Ynetnews. On the eve of Israel's offensive, 'Peres warned Hamas that if it wants normal life for the people of Gaza, then it must stop firing rockets into Israel.'

In 2014, during an unprecedented bombardment of Gaza, Peres stepped up once again to whitewash war crimes. After Israeli forces killed four small children playing on a beach, Peres knew who to blame – the Palestinians: 'It was an area that we warned would be bombed,' he said. 'And unfortunately they didn't take

out the children.'

The choking blockade, condemned internationally as a form of prohibited collective punishment, has also been defended by Peres – precisely on the grounds that it is a form of collective punishment. As Peres put it in 2014: 'If Gaza ceases fire, there will be no need for a blockade.'

Peres' support for collective punishment also extended to Iran. Commenting in 2012 on reports that six million Iranians suffering from cancer were unable to get treatment due to sanctions, Peres said: 'If they want to return to a normal life, let them become normal.'

Unapologetic to the end

Peres was always clear about the goal of a peace deal with the Palestinians. As he said in 2014: 'The first priority is preserving Israel as a Jewish state. That is our central goal, that is what we are fighting for.' Last year he reiterated these sentiments in an interview with the Associated Press, saying: 'Israel should implement the two-state solution for her own sake,' so as not to 'lose our [Jewish] majority'.

This, recall, was what shaped Labour's support for the Oslo Accords. Rabin, speaking to the Israeli parliament not long before his assassination in 1995, was clear that what Israel sought from the Oslo Accords was a Palestinian 'entity' that would be 'less than a state'. Jerusalem would be Israel's undivided capital, key settlements would be annexed and Israel would remain in the Jordan Valley.

A few years ago, Peres described the Palestinians as 'self-victimising'. He went on: 'They victimise themselves. They are a victim of their own mistakes unnecessarily.' Such cruel condescension was characteristic of a man for whom 'peace' always meant colonial pacification. ♦

Ben White is a writer for the Middle East Monitor (www.middleeastmonitor.com), from which this article is reproduced.

Presidential debate moderator distorted Syrian reality

The American people are receiving a highly distorted view of the Syrian war – much propaganda, little truth – including from one of the moderators at the second presidential debate.

Robert Parry

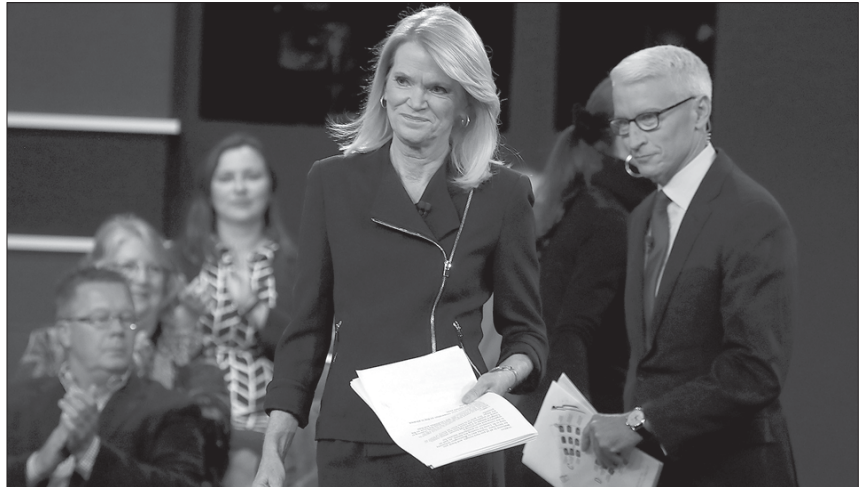
HOW ABC News' Martha Raddatz framed her question about Syria in the second presidential debate shows why the mainstream US news media, with its deep-seated biases and inability to deal with complexity, has become such a driving force for wider wars and even a threat to the future of the planet.

Raddatz, the network's chief global affairs correspondent, presented the Syrian conflict as simply a case of barbaric aggression by the Syrian government and its Russian allies against the Syrian people, especially the innocents living in Aleppo.

'Just days ago, the State Department called for a war crimes investigation of the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad and its ally, Russia, for their bombardment of Aleppo,' Raddatz said. 'So this next question comes through social media through Facebook. Diane from Pennsylvania asks, if you were president, what would you do about Syria and the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo? Isn't it a lot like the Holocaust when the US waited too long before we helped?'

The framing of the question assured a response from former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about her determination to expand the US military intervention in Syria to include a 'no-fly zone', which US military commanders say would require a massive operation that would kill many Syrians, both soldiers and civilians, to eliminate Syria's sophisticated air-defence systems and its air force.

But Raddatz's loaded question was also a way of influencing – or



During the second US presidential campaign debate, moderator Martha Raddatz (pic) failed to frame the Syria issue in a factual and nuanced way.

misleading – US public opinion. Consider for a moment how a more honest and balanced question could have elicited a very different response and a more thoughtful discussion:

'The situation in Aleppo presents a heartrending and nettlesome concern. Al Qaeda fighters and their rebel allies, including some who have been armed by the United States, are holed up in some neighbourhoods of eastern Aleppo. They've been firing rockets into the centre and western sections of Aleppo and they have shot civilians seeking to leave east Aleppo through humanitarian corridors.

'These terrorists and their "moderate" rebel allies seem to be using the tens of thousands of civilians still in east Aleppo as "human shields" in order to create sympathy from Western audiences when the Syrian government seeks to root the terrorists and other insurgents from these neighbourhoods with airstrikes that have killed both armed fighters and civilians. In such a circumstance, what should the US role be and was

it a terrible mistake to supply these fighters with sophisticated rockets and other weapons, given that these weapons have helped Al Qaeda in seizing and holding territory?'

Siding with Al Qaeda

Raddatz also could have noted that a key reason the recent limited ceasefire failed was that the US-backed 'moderate' rebels in east Aleppo had rebuffed Secretary of State John Kerry's demand that they separate themselves from Al Qaeda's Nusra Front, which now calls itself the Syria Conquest Front.

Instead of breaking ties with Al Qaeda, some of these 'moderate' rebel groups reaffirmed or expanded their alliances with Al Qaeda. In other words, Official Washington's distinction between Al Qaeda's terrorists and the 'moderate' rebels was publicly revealed to be largely a myth. But the reality of US-aided rebels collaborating with the terror group that carried out the 9/11 attacks

complicates the preferred mainstream narrative of Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin ‘the bad guys’ versus the rebels ‘the good guys’.

If Raddatz had posed her question with the more complex reality (rather than the simplistic, biased form that she chose) and if Clinton still responded with her recipe of a ‘no-fly zone’, the obvious follow-up would be: ‘Wouldn’t such a military intervention constitute aggressive war against Syria in violation of the United Nations Charter and the Nuremberg principles?’

‘And wouldn’t such a strategy risk tipping the military balance inside Syria in favour of Al Qaeda and its jihadist allies, possibly even its spin-off terror group, the Islamic State? And what would the United States do then, if its destruction of the Syrian air force led to the black flag of jihadist terror flying over Damascus as well as all of Aleppo? Would a Clinton administration send in US troops to stop the likely massacre of Christians, Alawites, Shiites, secular Sunnis and other “heretics”?’

There would be other obvious and important questions that a more objective Martha Raddatz would ask: ‘Would your no-fly zone include shooting down Russian aircraft that are flying inside Syria at the invitation of the Syrian government? Might such a clash provoke a superpower escalation, possibly even invite nuclear war?’

But no such discussion is allowed inside the mainstream US media’s frame. There is an unstated assumption that the United States has the unquestioned right to invade other countries at will, regardless of international law, and there is a studied silence about this hypocrisy even as the US State Department touts the sanctity of international law.

Whose war crimes?

Raddatz’s favourable reference to the State Department accusing the Syrian and Russian governments of war crimes further suggests a stunning lack of self-awareness, a blindness to America’s own guilt in that



Rebel fighters in Aleppo, Syria. A key reason the recent limited ceasefire in Aleppo failed was that the US-backed ‘moderate’ rebels in east Aleppo had rebuffed Secretary of State John Kerry’s demand that they separate themselves from Al Qaeda’s Nusra Front, which now calls itself the Syria Conquest Front.

regard. How can any American journalist put on such blinders regarding even recent US war crimes, including the illegal invasion of Iraq that led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis?

While Raddatz referenced ‘the heartbreaking video of a 5-year-old Syrian boy named Omran sitting in an ambulance after being pulled from the rubble after an airstrike in Aleppo’, she seems to have no similar sympathy for the slaughtered and maimed children of Iraq who suffered under American bombs – or the people of Yemen who have faced a prolonged aerial onslaught from Saudi Arabia using US aircraft and US-supplied ordnance.

Regarding Iraq, there was the case at the start of the US-led war when President George W Bush mistakenly thought Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein might be eating at a Baghdad restaurant so US warplanes levelled it, killing more than a dozen civilians, including children and a young woman whose headless body was recovered by her mother.

‘When the broken body of the 20-year-old woman was brought out torso first, then her head,’ the Associated Press reported, ‘her mother started crying uncontrollably, then collapsed.’ The London *Independent* cited this restaurant attack as one that represented ‘a clear breach’ of the Geneva Conventions ban on bombing civilian targets.

But such civilian deaths were of

little interest to the mainstream US media. ‘American talking heads ... never seemed to give the issue any thought,’ wrote Eric Boehlert in a report on the US war coverage for Salon.com. ‘Certainly they did not linger on images of the hellacious human carnage left in the aftermath.’

Thousands of other civilian deaths were equally horrific. Saad Abbas, 34, was wounded in an American bombing raid, but his family sought to shield him from the greater horror. The bombing had killed his three daughters Marwa, 11; Tabarek, 8; and Safia, 5, who had been the centre of his life. ‘It wasn’t just ordinary love,’ his wife said. ‘He was crazy about them. It wasn’t like other fathers.’ (*New York Times*, 14 April 2003)

The horror of the war was captured, too, in the fate of 12-year-old Ali Ismaeel Abbas, who lost his two arms when a US missile struck his Baghdad home. Ali’s father, his pregnant mother and his siblings were all killed. As the armless Ali was evacuated to a Kuwaiti hospital, becoming a symbol of US compassion for injured Iraqi civilians, the boy said he would rather die than live without his hands.

Because of the horrors inflicted on Iraq – and the resulting chaos that has now spread across the region and into Europe – Raddatz could have asked Clinton, who as a US senator voted for the illegal war, whether she felt any responsibility for this carnage.

Of course, Raddatz would not ask that question because the US mainstream media was almost universally on-board the Iraq War bandwagon, which helps explain why there has been virtually no accountability for those war crimes.

Letting Clinton off

So, Clinton was not pressed on her war judgments regarding either Iraq or the Libyan 'regime change' that she championed in 2011, another war of choice that transformed the once-prosperous North African nation into a failed state. Raddatz's biased framing also put Republican Donald Trump on the defensive for resisting yet another American 'regime change' project in Syria.

Trump was left muttering some right-wing talking points that sought to attack Clinton as soft on Syria, trying to link her to President Barack Obama's decision not to bomb the Syrian military in August 2013 after a mysterious sarin gas attack outside Damascus, which occurred six months after Clinton had resigned as Secretary of State.

Trump: 'She was there as Secretary of State with the so-called line in the sand, which...

Clinton: 'No, I wasn't. I was gone. I hate to interrupt you, but at some point...

Trump: 'OK. But you were in contact – excuse me. You were...

Clinton: 'At some point, we need to do some fact-checking here.

Trump: 'You were in total contact with the White House, and perhaps, sadly, Obama probably still listened to you. I don't think he would be listening to you very much anymore. Obama draws the line in the sand. It was laughed at all over the world what happened.'

In bashing Obama for not bombing Syria – after US intelligence expressed suspicion that the sarin attack was actually carried out by Al Qaeda or a related group trying to trick the US military into attacking the Syrian government – Trump may have pleased his right-wing base but he was deviating from his generally less war-



A US bomb strike on the city of Najaf in 2004 during the Iraq War. The US mainstream media was almost universally on board the Iraq War bandwagon.

like stance on the Middle East.

He followed that up with another false right-wing claim that Clinton and Obama had allowed the Russians to surge ahead on nuclear weapons, saying: 'Our nuclear programme has fallen way behind, and they've gone wild with their nuclear programme. Not good.'

Only after attacking Clinton for not being more militaristic did Trump say a few things that made sense, albeit in his incoherent snide-aside style.

Trump: 'Now, she talks tough, she talks really tough against Putin and against Assad. She talks in favour of the rebels. She doesn't even know who the rebels are. You know, every time we take rebels, whether it's in Iraq or anywhere else, we're arming people. And you know what happens? They end up being worse than the people [we overthrow].

'Look at what she did in Libya with [Muammar] Gaddafi. Gaddafi's out. It's a mess. And, by the way, ISIS has a good chunk of their oil. I'm sure you probably have heard that.' (Actually, whether one has heard it or not, that point is not true. During the ongoing political and military strife, Libya has been blocked from selling its oil, which is shipped by sea.)

Trump continued: 'It was a disaster. Because the fact is, almost everything she's done in foreign policy has been a mistake and it's been a disaster.

'But if you look at Russia, just

take a look at Russia, and look at what they did this week, where I agree, she wasn't there, but possibly she's consulted. We sign a peace treaty. Everyone's all excited. Well, what Russia did with Assad and, by the way, with Iran, who you made very powerful with the dumbest deal perhaps I've ever seen in the history of deal-making, the Iran deal, with the \$150 billion, with the \$1.7 billion in cash, which is enough to fill up this room.

'But look at that deal. Iran now and Russia are now against us. So she wants to fight. She wants to fight for rebels. There's only one problem. You don't even know who the rebels are. So what's the purpose?'

While one can't blame Raddatz for Trump's scattered thinking – or for Clinton's hawkishness – the moderator's failure to frame the Syrian issue in a factual and nuanced way contributed to this dangerously misleading 'debate' on a grave issue of war and peace.

It is surely not the first time that the mainstream US media has failed the American people in this way, but – given the stakes of a possible nuclear war with Russia – this propagandistic style of 'journalism' is fast becoming an existential threat. ♦

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for the Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. He is the founder and editor of Consortiumnews.com, where the above article first appeared. His latest book is America's Stolen Narrative: From Washington and Madison, to Nixon, Reagan and the Bushes, to Barack Obama.

Speaking truth to power: The killing of Dag Hammarskjöld and the cover-up

There has been no really satisfactory investigation into the death 55 years ago of the UN's second Secretary-General in an air crash in Zambia whilst on an official mission to resolve the crisis in the Congo. Whilst there is persuasive evidence that Dag Hammarskjöld's plane was shot down by hostile fire, the consistent uncooperative attitude of the UK and US governments has always smacked of a cover-up. The recent UN initiative for a fresh inquiry is a move long overdue.

**Henning Melber and
Susan Williams**

FIFTY-FIVE years ago, shortly after midnight on 18 September 1961, an aircraft crashed on its approach to Ndola airport in the British colony of Northern Rhodesia, which is now Zambia. On board were 16 people: the UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, the members of his mission, and the Swedish crew. The sole survivor, who spoke of 'sparks in the sky' and said the plane 'blew up', died six days later.

Suspicious were voiced about the crash because of the strange details that quickly emerged. For instance, the British high commissioner, who was at Ndola, showed no concern that Hammarskjöld failed to land and insisted that he must have decided 'to go elsewhere'.

It took four hours after daybreak to start an official search. This in spite of local residents, policemen and soldiers reporting a great flash in the sky shortly after midnight. There were also witness accounts of a second, smaller plane trailing and then dropping something that 'looked like fire' upon the larger one.

The Prime Minister of the Congo, Cyrille Adoula, who had met with the Secretary-General just hours before the crash, believed he had been murdered. According to the 1961 *Montreal Gazette*, he had comment-



Wreckage of the plane that crashed carrying UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld (inset) and 15 other people on 18 September 1961.

ed: 'How ignoble is this assassination, not the first of its kind perpetrated by the moneyed powers. Mr Hammarskjöld was the victim of certain financial circles for whom a human life is not equal to a gram of copper or uranium.'

There were several inquiries into the crash in 1961-62, all of which failed to take seriously the testimonies of Zambian witnesses. A Rhodesian Commission of Inquiry identified pilot error as the cause of the crash. This was solely on the basis of an elimination of the other suggested causes.

A UN inquiry, however, reached an open verdict and stated that it could not rule out sabotage or attack. This led the UN General Assembly to pass a resolution requesting the Secretary-General 'to inform the General Assembly of any new evidence which may come to his attention'.

More than half a century and many inquiries later, the search for the truth about what happened that September night continues. On 17 August 2016, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on the 71st UN General Assembly to appoint an 'eminent person or persons' to review the new information on the crash. He urged member states to release relevant records for review.

Ban's statement ended on a moving and powerful note: 'This may be our last chance to find the truth. Seeking a complete understanding of the circumstances is our solemn duty to my illustrious and distinguished predecessor, Dag Hammarskjöld, to the other members of the party accompanying him, and to their families.'

Hammarskjöld, as second Secretary-General, sought to shape the UN as an organisation devoted to peace. He developed the strategy of 'preven-

tive diplomacy', which defused the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. His prevailing commitment was to the UN Charter and he refused to act in the interest of any particular state.

In 1961, the UN was only 15 years old and was undergoing a dramatic shift as European decolonisation gathered pace. The Afro-Asian bloc now provided 47 UN members out of 100. For these new states, said Hammarskjöld, the UN was their 'main platform' and protector.

For decades, the former colonial powers have written the history of the night on which Hammarskjöld and his companions died. But a new history is about to be written if the recent momentum to find the full truth is anything to go by.

New quest for the truth

Hammarskjöld was on the way to meet Moïse Tshombe, leader of the Belgian-backed secession of Katanga province from the newly independent Congo. Mineral-rich Katanga was of geostrategic importance, not least because of a mine in Katanga which produced the richest uranium in the world.

The UN's declaration that it could not rule out sabotage or attack and the request for any new evidence emerged in 2011 as a crucial point of reference in the book *Who Killed Hammarskjöld?: The UN, the Cold War and White Supremacy in Africa*. The book drew on a mass of evidence that had been available for many years but had been dismissed by the early inquiries, and presented many new findings.

The disturbing compilation of evidence includes the testimony of Commander Charles Southall, a naval officer working for the US National Security Agency listening station in Cyprus in 1961. Southall heard the recording of a pilot shooting down Hammarskjöld's plane.

British peer Lord Lea of Crodall read the book and resolved to set up a new inquiry. Interest was growing. Professor K G Hammar, former Archbishop of the Church of Sweden, went to Zambia with Hans

Kristian Simensen, a Norwegian researcher, and called on Sweden to get the case reopened. In 2012 the Hammarskjöld Inquiry Trust was formed, including Chief Emeka Anyaoku of Nigeria. The Trust set up the Hammarskjöld Commission, an international group of four distinguished jurists, chaired by a former British Lord Justice of Appeal.

After a rigorous examination of the available evidence and interviews in Ndola with witnesses who were still alive, the commission concluded: 'There is persuasive evidence that the aircraft was subjected to some form of attack or threat as it circled to land at Ndola ... [and] was in fact forced into its descent by some form of hostile action.'

It recommended that the UN conduct a further investigation and seek access to relevant records held by member states. The commission's report was made public on 9 September 2013. On the same day, UN Secretary-General Ban announced that he would closely study the findings.

Ban Ki-moon takes the lead

In March 2014, the Secretary-General asked the General Assembly to pursue the matter further. This was welcomed by the growing worldwide campaign that had by now developed, which urged the creation of a new inquiry. The movement was supported by sympathetic journalists, social media campaigners, individuals and organisations, largely coordinated by the United Nations Association Westminster Branch in London.

The Swedish government submitted a draft resolution to the UN General Assembly in October 2014, calling for a new investigation. This was strongly supported by Zambia.

On 29 December 2014, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution, authorising the Secretary-General to appoint an independent Panel of Experts to examine the evidence. Fifty-five nations joined Sweden to co-sponsor the resolution, which was adopted by the consensus of all 193 member states.

On 16 March 2015, Ban appoint-

ed a Panel of Experts headed by Mohamed Chande Othman, Chief Justice of Tanzania. Its report concluded that there was, indeed, significant information to warrant further inquiry into a possible aerial attack or other interference as a cause of the crash. It also introduced new areas to investigate, such as the possibility that Hammarskjöld's communications were intercepted.

On 2 July 2015, Ban circulated the report among member states and expressed the view that 'a further inquiry or investigation would be necessary to finally establish the facts.' He urged member states 'to disclose, declassify or otherwise allow privileged access to information that they may have in their possession'.

Following Ban's recommendations, the Swedish Permanent Mission to the UN circulated a draft resolution urging all member states to release any relevant records in their possession. The draft resolution was supported by 74 other states – but not the UK or the US.

When the Secretary-General in August 2016 called on the forthcoming General Assembly to appoint an eminent person or persons to take the inquiry forward, he attached as annexes to his statement the responses by several member states to the UN's earlier call for documentation. These show a readiness by South Africa to search for lost records relating to an alleged plot by mercenaries. They also reveal the uncooperative nature of the responses by the US and the UK.

Ban's courage, dignity and humanity in this matter have met with heartfelt appreciation by those who care about justice and about the principles enshrined in the UN Charter, which were advocated so vigorously by Hammarskjöld. It is to be hoped that Ban's successor will follow the same path, and with the same integrity and determination. ♦

Henning Melber is Extraordinary Professor in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria. Susan Williams is Senior Research Fellow at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, Institute of Commonwealth Studies. This article is reproduced from The Conversation (theconversation.com) under a Creative Commons licence.

Nim Ajpu: Indigenous lawyers who are changing the face of Guatemala

An indigenous legal organisation in Guatemala aims not only to protect indigenous rights but to decolonise themselves and the law. *Manuela Picq* explains.

NIM Ajpu is a name that's known to all Quiché Maya peoples. A *nahual* or spirit that accompanies and protects us in the Maya cosmovision, Nim Ajpu was the twin brother of Ixb'alamkej who together defeated the death gods and who went on numerous adventures that forever changed the face of existence. The story of these hero twins is told at length in the Popol Wuj, the famous text that accounts for the cosmologies, origins and spiritual histories of the Maya Quiché.

Nim Ajpu is also the name of the Association of Maya Lawyers and Notaries in Guatemala. The association supports the individual and collective rights of Indigenous Peoples through strategic litigation. Because the Maya represent over 60% of the population – which is largely discriminated against by state institutions – Nim Ajpu is unable to defend all Maya peoples in court, so it chooses instead to take strategic cases that can help set legal precedents. Their goal is to advance Indigenous rights in the legal and political system, eventually taking cases to the Inter-American system of human rights when domestic resolutions reiterate racist patterns.

Legal practice with Maya awareness

In 2004, a group of about 20 Maya lawyers gathered to find ways to better defend Indigenous communities through their legal practice. They were aware of what it entails to advocate from Indigenous experiences in the state judicial system. Stirred up by the enthusiasm of Amilcar Pop – the first Maya politician in Guate-

mala's Congress – they envisioned a legal organisation related to Maya communities and founded Nim Ajpu.

The organisation expanded in membership and strategies. It now counts over 100 members supported by councils and board members. Members include a vast array of law professionals, from lawyers to judges, public defenders and notaries; most lawyers have only supported cases of the association occasionally.

The core engine of Nim Ajpu are five full-time lawyers who lead the strategic litigation – Juan Castro, Cristian Otzin, Edgar de Leon, Melina Salvador and Claudia Chopen. They rely on the support of a small administrative team of eight people in an office in the capital. There are more affiliated lawyers from various nations across Guatemala who contribute on a voluntary basis, such as Rosa Ixcol (Maya K'iche') and Ixquik Poz (Maya Licúe).

In addition to litigation, Nim Ajpu works on political incidence, research and training. The Maya lawyers also challenge new laws presented in Congress and discuss policy in media venues. They play a crucial role in shaping ideas, whether it is by contesting government attempts to regulate prior consultation (2012) or to pass laws privatising corn seeds (2015). They train judges in legal pluralism, familiarising them with Indigenous concepts of law and justice. They teach university students, including at the Maya University. And every December, Nim Ajpu organises a two-day congress that brings together about 70 Indigenous lawyers to brainstorm current challenges.

Emblematic cases

Most cases tackle self-determination, whether it is to recover lands stolen by the state or to establish the authority of Indigenous systems of justice. Dozens of cases have already set important precedents for Indigenous Peoples in Guatemala.

For instance, a major win in 2004 established the autonomy of Indigenous justice in the Supreme Court. Maya lawyers defended Juan Zapeta, a Maya authority accused of administering justice in Santa Cruz de Quiché. It was one of the first cases in which Guatemalan courts recognised the rights of Maya communities to exercise their own forms of justice.

In 2010, Maya lawyers recovered communal land illegitimately appropriated by the state. The state had granted Indigenous land to telephone companies during the armed conflict (1973) in an act that ignored the prior existence of an Indigenous municipality. The recovery of land in the case of Chichicastenango set an important precedent in recognising Indigenous forms of government and accreditation mechanisms.

That same year, Maya lawyers set a precedent for rights to prior consultation. When the mayor of San Juan de Sacatepéquez cancelled a consultation on the construction of a cement company, protests erupted and a militarisation of the area followed. Maya lawyers took the case, pushing courts to make a first sentence on Indigenous rights to prior, free and informed consultation and to declare the ILO Convention 169 (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention) for part of the constitutional corpus.

Most recently, Maya lawyers defended ancestral authorities criminalised for defending rivers against extractive industries. Private companies, many of them hydroelectric projects, corrupt judges and accuse community leaders of fabricated crimes to keep them behind bars without due process. The use of legal warfare kept Maya authorities in preventive prison for months or years, and these highly political cases were taken by Maya lawyers.

In 2015, a team of Maya lawyers freed ancestral authorities accused of a crime they did not commit in Santa Cruz Barrias, near the border with Chiapas. In July 2016, they freed seven political prisoners accused of fabricated crimes, including Rigoberto Juárez and Domingo Baltazar. In August, Maya lawyers took the defence of Oscar Sanchez, the 11th authority of a Maya Mam community sentenced without evidence to the preventive jail of Quetzaltenango.

In addition, two emblematic cases have already set precedents this year. One case secured bilingual education as courts recognised the rights of Maya communities to receive education in their own languages. Another was a hard battle over a case of rape that had been judged and sentenced by Indigenous justice. Feminists joined right-wing sectors in contesting the capacity of Maya authorities. Ultimately the Constitutional Court, which stands above the Supreme Court, recognised the authority of Indigenous justice.

Among many other cases, Nim Ajpu is presently involved in the ongoing effort to rewrite Guatemala's civil war constitution to add concepts of self-determination and explicit language defining Guatemala as a plurinational state.

Maya lawyers have been recognised or hated depending on context and perspective. Private companies and even the president decried lawyers like Amilcar Pop as terrorists who arm Maya communities, especially when they defend Indigenous rights to consultation against extractive industries. Overall, however, Maya lawyers have become a refer-

ent in Guatemala. Communities consider them their lawyers. Nim Ajpu is now the entity that positions collective rights in Guatemala; both government and society expect its opinion on new legislation.

Decolonial litigation

One of the greatest strengths of Nim Ajpu lies in its functioning. First, there are no fees. All legal support is provided free of charge, *ad honorem*. Communities do not pay for the legal services, though they may offer food to lawyers on the ground. Lawyers are not paid by case or by hours; they receive some form of recognition for their work depending on donations from international organisations, like the small funding provided by the Association of Lawyers of Norway.

Maya lawyers do not defend 'clients' but stand by brothers and sisters.

Second, Maya authorities are the ones to bring forward the cases, and Maya lawyers lend legal support to ancestral authorities. This implies long-term relationships beyond the moment of litigation. The various Maya lawyers accompany ancestral authorities in their practices of autonomous government and administration of justice.

Nim Ajpu relates to broad Maya networks like the Great Council of Indigenous authorities of Iximulew, lending support to their political consolidation. Some are long-recognised Indigenous municipalities that have existed in official registries since the colonial era. Chichicastenango (consisting of 83 Indigenous communities each with its autonomous political authorities) defended its autonomy from the Spanish Crown in 1635. The municipality of Sololá (71 communities) had Indigenous mayors registered in colonial records since 1557. The lasting authority of the 48 Can-

tones (48 communities) is still recognised today in presidential speeches.

Yet other organisations are less known, and their invisibility makes them vulnerable to state entities eager to appropriate their lands. In such cases, Maya lawyers play key roles in consolidating Indigenous authority, first among networks of Maya authorities, then through collective land titles. Maya communities are not civil associations authorised by state organs: they are accredited under Maya ancestral mechanisms without having to ask permission from state bodies.

Third, Maya lawyers try to break away from the logic of the Western state system. They try to decolonise themselves by escaping the logic of state law, paying attention to the struggles of Maya communities, listening rather than telling. Their litigation is a strategic struggle against a legal system that posits itself as sovereign authority. They do not defend 'clients' but stand by brothers and sisters. Many Indigenous lawyers around the world seek to decolonise themselves and the law; the singularity of Nim Ajpu is to have taken this effort to an institutional level.

Academics are also joining in Nim Ajpu's political, historical and cultural commitment. Lawyer Mellina Salvador says that historians, linguists and anthropologists channel their knowledge through expert reports, feeling part of the association. Maya litigation reaches well beyond law, engaging scholarly insights for historical contextualisation.

The essence of Nim Ajpu is best summarised by lawyer Juan Castro: 'Our Maya identity is a political one, we defend our territories, we speak Indigenous languages and understand Maya cosmovision.' A Maya lawyer is a political identity, one that challenges conventional legalities and quietly redefines state authority. ♦

Manuela Lavinas Picq is a Professor of International Relations at Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ), Ecuador, and former Research Fellow at desiguALdades.net, Freie Universität Berlin. This article is reproduced from IC Magazine (intercontinentalcry.org), a publication of the Center for World Indigenous Studies.

Burkini ban reverse: Sign of French resistance?

Overturning the burkini ban will do little to reverse the Islamophobic consensus in France that is stirred up by politicians and the media alike, writes *Emma Ducassé*.

FRANCE's highest administrative court, the Conseil d'Etat, has rightfully ruled against the controversial ban of the burkini – a full-body swimsuit worn by some Muslim women on beaches – giving no credence to the reasons invoked by the French political elite for vociferously supporting the ban.

But this will do little to reverse a trend that political leaders have willingly harnessed: the stigmatisation of the Muslim community, the legitimisation of violence against Muslim women, and ultimately the institutionalisation of a cross-party Islamophobic consensus that's aggravating tensions and creating fertile ground for civil unrest in the aftermath of the Nice attacks.

The unashamed support by politicians in France for the discriminatory bans against the swimwear stems more from an eagerness to restore their lacklustre image in the run-up to the presidential elections rather than to protect national security or uphold so-called French Republican values, as the court's ruling seems to imply.

But the decision to invalidate the bans for serious breach of basic freedoms will neither put an end to the polemic nor to the government's racist political agenda, explicitly laid out by Prime Minister Manuel Valls who, defying the court's judgment, declared that the burkini ban was a measure designed to fight against a retrograde and deadly Islamism.

Creating an Islamophobic consensus

On 26 August, the Conseil d'Etat rightly rejected the burkini ban that had been introduced by a mayor on



France's highest administrative court has ruled that the ban on the burkini swimsuit represents a serious and clear breach of the law and individual freedoms.

the French Riviera in Villeneuve-Loubet near Nice. It stated that the ban represented a serious and clear breach of the law and individual freedoms, adding that wearing the swimsuit was not a proven risk to public order.

This long-awaited decision – which sets a precedent for the other 30 communes where similar bans were introduced – was welcomed by the Human Rights League (LDH) and Collective Against Islamophobia in France (CCIF) who had challenged the mayor's ban.

The right-wing mayors of Cannes and of Nice had promulgated the burkini ban, forcing women to 'wear clothes that are morally acceptable and in line with the principles of *laïcité*', a term which refers to French secularism or the principle of separation of church and state. They claimed the swimsuit was a uniform symbolising Islamic terrorism which could pose a threat to public order. Other mayors, including a left-wing mayor in Sisco, Corsica, followed suit, basing their decisions on similar argu-

ments and creating a domino effect across France.

Although the bans were first introduced by right-wing and far-right mayors, the sensationalist headlines in the mainstream press coupled with the hysteria instigated by politicians bent on stirring up racist hatred for political gains have led politicians across the political spectrum to support the bans, thus creating a dangerous Islamophobic consensus in France, with a recent public opinion poll showing 64% support for the ban.

Although the court's unequivocal decision largely discredits the dubious reasons used to justify the ban, the consensus has been allowed to flourish, despite criticism voiced by anti-racist organisations and the international press.

Prime Minister Valls has stated he understands the concerns of the mayors, claiming the bans were not political but solely linked to national security, adding that the burkini was a symbol of women's oppression. Left-wing leaders such as Jean-Luc

Melenchon have claimed the burkini was a political provocation, adding that any public signs of religion were catastrophic.

Other, more neutral voices have emerged but regrettably very few have had the courage to condemn the misogynistic and Islamophobic measures, with only the Communist Party of France (PCF) and the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) overtly condemning them.

If anything, in the run-up to the presidential elections, French politicians across the political spectrum have stooped to new lows in their efforts to convince public opinion that burkinis are France's public enemy number one, a dangerous threat to the values of the French Republic. In addition, they have suddenly portrayed themselves as fervent defenders of women's rights in order to outbid their competitors in the presidential race. Even Women's Rights Minister Laurence Rossignol felt the urge to condemn what she perceived as an 'archaic item of clothing'.

The international press has understandably not failed to mock the absurdity of the controversy, not to mention the questionable right of a mayor to rule on women's dress code. But however trivial debates over this clothing may seem, the concrete consequences of criminalising women's clothing are extremely dangerous, for it instills in the public's imagination a widespread lie that all Muslim women who wear a burkini are potential terrorists, and humiliates them in the process.

Stoking civil unrest

The burkini – originally designed by the Australian Aheda Zanetti in 2004 to enable Muslim women to bathe freely in public spaces – is a light swimsuit that leaves only the face, hands and feet uncovered.

It's hard to imagine IS tolerating the swimwear, let alone on beaches where semi-nudity and gender mix-



A police officer stands guard as Muslim women leave a mosque in Paris after Friday prayers. The French political elite's irresponsible actions and statements are sustaining a racist, sexist and Islamophobic climate in the country.

ing are the norm. This shows that some feminists are rather hasty in their judgment, in particular when evidence suggests that Muslim women who wear burkinis in France are generally young and integrated into French society. Judging a book by its cover has never proven to be very insightful.

But whatever one may think of this attire, fining women who wear this clothing or indeed coercing women into removing the clothing on public beaches cannot be seen as anything other than degrading.

As feminist Arundhati Roy eloquently stated of the burka: 'When an attempt is made to coerce women out of the burka rather than creating a situation in which a woman can choose what she wishes to do, it's not about liberating her but about unclothing her. It's an act of violence, humiliation and cultural imperialism.'

Alarming photographs and videos of armed police asking Muslim women to remove clothing and issuing fines for not 'respecting good morals and secularism' on beaches in France have been published widely, causing international dismay.

The political elite's irresponsible actions and statements are thus consciously sustaining a racist, sexist and Islamophobic climate which then authorises the type of violent outbursts witnessed in Bastia, Corsica, when 200 Corsicans marched into Lupino – a housing estate with a high proportion of people of North Afri-

can origin – shouting 'this is our home', effectively demanding the exclusion of non-white French citizens.

These racist reactions could not have spontaneously emerged had the political elite and the mainstream media not created favourable conditions for such ideas to flourish. Moreover, these shocking examples highlight the extent to which the burkini ban controversy excludes Muslims, creating a feeling of injustice that arguably makes for fertile ground for radicalisation.

The Nice attack was indeed a terrible tragedy but let us not forget that the greatest casualties of IS have been Muslims, and that sustaining a climate of fear and exclusion of Muslims while passing off discriminatory measures as benevolent, is a dangerous game to play.

The Islamophobia of ministers, political leaders and editorialists negatively impacts the lives of millions of people in France: legitimising discrimination against Muslims, encouraging violence against women in burkinis or headscarves, and generally making the lives of French Muslims and anyone of North African origin a living nightmare.

More globally, the Islamophobic consensus is just another chapter in the history of selecting an easy scapegoat to blame for all society's ills, be it migrants, Romani travellers or Blacks. This is particularly true of an unpopular government that would rather pander to the racist and Islamophobic National Front electorate than attempt to create an inclusive project for society based on solidarity and tolerance, which is the only path that makes sense in the fight against terrorism. ♦

Emma Ducassé is a Franco-British citizen currently working as an English lecturer at the University of Toulouse II, France. She worked as a journalist prior to this and takes an active interest in French and British politics. The above article was originally published by The New Arab (www.alaraby.co.uk/english).

South African schoolgirls provide leadership for the ongoing revolution

The recent courageous protest by students of Pretoria Girls High School against school rules embodying racist prejudices has its antecedents in the historic student protests of Soweto 40 years ago.

**Marsha Adebayo and
Siki Dlanga**

PRETORIA Girls High School was shaken to its core in August when Black girls attending this apartheid-era elite school challenged fundamental tenets of white supremacy. This challenge occurred in Pretoria, the official seat of the apartheid regime, a city known for its brutality and savage treatment of Africans. (The city has since been renamed, in the post-apartheid era, Tshwane.)

Refusing to bow down to long-held notions of European beauty standards and African inferiority, the girls, who were around 13 years old, asserted that their humanity was not negotiable. With afros and dignity intact, they bravely raised their little fists under the South African sky and shook the world.

The girls were protesting racist practices embodied in school guidelines which forced Black girls to straighten their African hair as well as imposed penalties for Black girls socialising together in groups.

Forty years ago, about an hour from Pretoria Girls High School, a 13-year-old boy named Hector Zolile Peterson was shot dead by the apartheid regime. Soweto 1976 has become part of protest language among young Black South Africans. Hector was shot in Soweto while he and his fellow students were protesting against using Afrikaans, the language of their oppressors, as the official language of instruction. The young man, Mbuyisa Makhubu, photographed



Thirteen-year-old Zulaikha Patel was at the forefront of the Pretoria Girls High School student protests.

carrying Hector in his arms went missing in the days following Hector's murder. The apartheid government sought to hunt him down after the photograph became a symbol of the viciousness of the deadly apartheid regime. His family is still searching for him.

The valiant protest of the Pretoria schoolgirls 40 years after Hector's death reveals the continuity of the struggle for liberation and confirms that the Soweto uprising was not in vain.

The death of Nelson Mandela exposed the underbelly of neoliberal economic policies that tolerated Black leadership in South Africa but exploded racial and class inequalities. The negotiated 'peace' blessed by Western powers in London, Amsterdam and Washington maintained white economic global power in the country at the expense of the Black majority. A new generation of activ-

ists now draws on the likes of Steven Bantu Biko, Chris Hani, the young activists of the 1976 Soweto uprising and Robert Sobukwe in order to ignite the unfinished business of South Africa's total liberation.

The #RhodesMustFall movement, which began 9 March 2015 at the University of Cape Town, arguably sparked this contagious flame that has now found new expression among young schoolgirls. At the heart of the RMF movement is the decolonisation conversation. It addresses decolonisation of spaces, minds, languages, education and land. It speaks of total freedom from all kinds of manifestations of white domination faced by Black South Africans daily as a result of the legacy of the global system of white supremacy and apartheid. This movement in turn gave rise to the #FeesMustFall movement which demanded free tuition in South African universities for both

students and Black maintenance workers who are usually condemned to intergenerational poverty.

The 13-year-old Pretoria Girls High School student leader Zulaikha Patel is often referred to as ‘little Angela Davis’ by South Africans. She was iconically photographed with a defiant gaze before a white policeman, considered the oppressor of Black identity and freedom. In the photograph, her young arms are crossed just above her head, which is crowned by an unmistakable afro. What inspired the world was seeing Zulaikha, wearing her school uniform, standing before a large white male whose build is what is instinctively identified in South Africa as the figure of an Afrikaaner man.

Dogs and security were brought to the school to stop the girls from protesting. Officials and security tried to intimidate the girls by saying they would arrest them. The girls responded with the fierce chant: ‘Arrest us!’

Other schools have since seen similar protests, among them Sans Souci Girls High School. Students in this school made headlines protesting against racist practices that included imposing punishment and fines if the girls spoke their African mother tongue, Xhosa. Sans Souci, a former white school located in the leafy Cape Town suburb of Newlands, forced the girls to speak English even when they were outside of the school premises. Girls showed evidence on their merit books where they were de-merited for speaking Xhosa. Black schoolchildren symbolically tore the books as a form of protest, symbolising the burning of apartheid-era pass books which were issued in order to control the movement of Black South Africans.

One of the parents of the protesting Sans Souci girls, interviewed for this article, said: ‘The principal of the school has a really old colonial mindset.’ The girls are demanding the resignation of the white school principal, Charmaine Murray, tweeting and shouting #MurrayMustFall. They call for a Black school principal to replace her. This would be the first time that Black students have asserted such power at such a school. Black stu-



Students of Pretoria Girls High School protest school guidelines forcing Black girls to straighten their hair and imposing penalties for Black girls socialising together in groups.



Students from Sans Souci Girls High School in Cape Town have protested the school's imposition of punishment on girls for speaking their African mother tongue Xhosa.

dents at Sans Souci have a detailed list of demands that include addressing white supremacy and the inclusion of their native tongues as part of the school curriculum. The Sans Souci principal went into hiding during the protest after years of terrorising Black children.

The current student movements have their antecedents in the youth movements of 40 years ago. These students are fighting for their lives, their dignity and their humanity. Learning and speaking one's language is a fundamental principle that must be affirmed in the fight against white supremacy. Language contains

a people's memory, their stories and their heritage. It is how South Africans remember purpose, nation, family, love and community.

After thousands signed an online petition supporting the Pretoria students, the head of Gauteng province's education department ordered the code of conduct clause dealing with hairstyles to be suspended.

The Pretoria Girls High School protest is built upon the wings of the anti-colonial struggle in South Africa and should provide inspiration to Black girls colonised in the US, Europe and around the world. ♦

Dr. Marsha Adebayo is editor of and columnist with the Black Agenda Report website (www.blackagendareport.com), from which this article is reproduced. She is the author of the Pulitzer Prize-nominated No FEAR: A Whistleblower's Triumph over Corruption and Retaliation at the EPA. She worked at the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for 18 years and blew the whistle on a US multinational corporation that endangered South African vanadium mine workers. Her successful lawsuit led to the introduction and passage of the first civil rights and whistleblower law of the 21st century: the Notification of Federal Employees Anti-discrimination and Retaliation Act of 2002 (No FEAR Act). She is Director of Transparency and Accountability for the Green Shadow Cabinet, serves on the Advisory Board of ExposeFacts.com and coordinates the Hands Up Coalition, DC.

Siki Dlanga is the South African author of a poetry anthology Word of Worth. She is also a columnist and a creative activist based in Cape Town. She leads Freedom Mantle, a Christian initiative that supports emerging leaders to shape a new South African narrative. Freedom Mantle participates in and initiates spaces of activism in pursuit of a more just nation and world.

Greed and delusion

How my Silicon Valley start-up tried to exploit a developing country

Jeff Kunzler warns against the Silicon Valley delusion, i.e., the widespread belief that technology will solve the problems of Africa and the developing world.

AS a freelance graphic designer living and working in New York City, I've seen more than my fair share of nonsensical start-ups: the artisan soap for men; the speed-dating reality web-show; the feminist ripoff of Snapchat. A lot of these haven't worked out, but I'm happy to go in, give it my best shot, and see what we can make happen. One of these start-ups ended up taking over my life for the better part of two years. Little did I know, the person running it had grand delusions of what was possible in a developing nation like Ghana – harebrained ideas rooted in a delusion of what Silicon Valley technology could allegedly do for the world.

While the media covers large-scale start-up failures such as Theranos, stories like mine fall through the cracks. I wound up on the other side of the world trying to put Google Glass on solar-powered electric taxis even though the power goes out at least once a day.

Many Westerners are under the Silicon Valley delusion: we want to believe the world's problems can simply be solved through the application of tech. Take Facebook bringing the Internet to Africa via drones. Sure, most would say they don't think we can 'Grubhub' away problems as big as unclean water with the magic of capitalist tech start-ups. But the start-up community's 'philanthropy is the future of marketing' ploy ensures that problems go unfixed as it pats itself on the back for pretending to do good.

In mid-2012 I picked up an interesting freelance design client in New York, a solar start-up wanting to do business in West Africa. The company was run by a former NASA robotics expert. I was more than hap-

py to knock out some mock-ups here and there, the money was really good, and I was happy to work with the client. I never had to meet the client, the work was all done over email, and I never had to worry about not getting paid, so it was a good gig. After I completed the project, we kept in touch, and I ended up getting another job with them later that included some travelling, to Atlanta, to London, and eventually, to Ghana.

The job was great, not only for the occasional perks, but also for the opportunity to apply my professional skills to something that would hopefully, in some small way, help improve the world. When the work you do feels meaningful, you're more loyal and dedicated to what you're doing – and this, I later realised, encouraged the brushing aside of questions about bumps in the road, or the plausibility of proposed ideas. I felt like I was working towards a positive change in the world, putting together project proposals and branding guides and trying to figure out a real plan to get solar power to really work for places like Ghana. Sure, some of these ideas were aiming a bit high, but I was willing to put in the work to make them reality.

In early 2014, I got on a plane from New York to Kotoka International Airport in the lovely capital city of Accra, Ghana. I was there to do a job, get paid, maybe improve the lives of some Ghanaians, and leave – or so I was led to believe.

Once we'd settled in and got down to business, I was tasked with branding and developing a vast portfolio of projects we were trying to get off the ground, including a solar research facility with the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission and a space

camp for kids. The biggest project was a woman-operated electric taxi service powered by solar energy. When these female drivers weren't taking fares, the Google Glass headsets they were wearing would be used so local consumers on their smartphones could haggle with street merchants from the comfort of their own homes. If this sounds a little confusing, that's because it is.

This is where what I call the Silicon Valley delusion – that tech will solve all problems – comes into play. When I list all of these ambitious projects, most of which don't really have any existing equivalent in Western nations, one would safely assume that yes, there would be a lot of significant problems that would get in the way between Point A and Point B. But I quickly learnt that when working for someone under the Silicon Valley delusion, there is no point in bringing these up.

I'll give you just a taste of all the problems I identified: The smartphone/Google Glass/street market shopping service would disrupt the local errand boy industry, so that might not go over too well. Also, in a city where everyone relies on mobile hotspots, how does one reliably stream video at a quality high enough to buy and sell merchandise reliably? Most of the taxi drivers in Ghana are male, so we'd have to recruit and train female drivers, even though the nearest driving school is a sham. Getting electric cars to Ghana from China ended up becoming a logistical nightmare of months of dealing with customs to try to get them out of the port – only to have half of them catch fire. Once they arrived, the Ghanaian mechanics proved to be untrained in electric cars. Oh, and we didn't even

have any solar panels at the compound we were living in, so we couldn't even prove we could make this work for ourselves.

There already was solar in Great Accra, at the Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, an institute of the University of Ghana, and gee whiz, was that a doozy! Hearing the deputy director explain it, I started to realise how easy it was for developed nations to exploit the developing world. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) comes in and spends all of this money setting up a solar panel installation. This gift comes with two kickers: first of all, the solar panels only work two-thirds of the time. So the other third of the time forces the facility to rely on the only electricity provider in Ghana, the Electricity Company of Ghana. Secondly, JICA didn't provide any funds for maintenance and upkeep – and maintaining solar panels in a place like Ghana is a very expensive venture. So it became obvious that this was a very good deal for JICA, which got to spend a lot of grant money and write itself a very nice paycheque, and a very bad deal for the people of Ghana. The Noguchi facility is just one example of so much of what I saw in Ghana: a country being exploited by countless outside influences.

To backpedal a minute, the Electricity Company of Ghana has a monopoly on electricity for the entire country. It has a unique scam, in that it offers 'prepaid' electricity via rechargeable cards and a card-swiping meter. So instead of paying a monthly bill, you simply wait until your power goes out before you recharge your prepaid meter. Of course, plenty of these meters are faulty, so they'll happily take your money, the transaction won't go through, and the Electricity Company of Ghana will insist you just give them money all over again – and you can't do anything about it because they have a monopoly on the nation's electricity.

My office in Ghana was understaffed and underfunded, and our assigned task was to generate proposal letters and get meetings with potential corporate sponsors to get them

funding our ideas and get them off the ground – even though we had nothing but ideas in the first place. Suddenly, that sinking feeling that this was all a sham run by someone who had no idea what they were doing started to set in. That, and the power going out on an almost daily basis, left only two things to do. The open-air bar next door made it very easy to smoke and drink the long periods of idle despair away.

Suddenly, that sinking feeling that this was all a sham run by someone who had no idea what they were doing started to set in.

Trying to get things out of port was a long, arduous process of running around Accra filing paperwork and hoping we got it all sorted in time before it becomes government property and is auctioned off. Of course, you could just pay a bribe to the right person ... everybody was hustling to get by. Being a white guy holding onto the back of a motorcycle driven by my black supervisor, I was often taken as someone using an illegal motorcycle taxi. So we'd be stopped by police, who, regardless of any alleged infraction, needed a bribe as well. They wore their AK-74 assault rifles under their shoulders, so you were staring down the business end of a gun for a minor roadside stop.

Regardless, we kept pushing. Dropping off letters and brochures. Requesting meetings with corporate suits and government ministers. Proposing things we didn't have the money to make happen. Things weren't going anywhere.

The most memorable of these was when my boss insisted we throw in 'solar roadways', an overly expensive and hard-to-maintain technological solution to generate power, in a presentation to the Deputy Minister of Transit. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the

cost of maintaining roads is very high due to the climate. Tucked in at the end of every other project we were proposing, it was the only thing the Deputy Minister wanted us to pursue – better roads that also generated power – and we used enough fancy words to make it sound like a plausible ideal.

The problem is that whole 'plausible' thing. While the Internet click-bait machine was taken by storm by how amazing the idea sounded, anybody with a little expertise in the subject and a blog was happy to actually explain just how bad and how implausible the entire concept actually was. Therein lies the core of the mindset of the Silicon Valley delusion: all of our problems solved by grand ideas, as long as you completely ignore any of the actual flaws or obstacles standing in the way of making these expensive ideas a reality.

In a drunken haze at about 3 in the morning towards the end of my stay in Ghana, I saw everything so clearly: the company I was working for was led by someone who believed that the solution for a country like Ghana was to inject it with a bunch of expensive technological 'disruptions'. What goes unspoken is that this slyly implies the nation's lack of prosperity lies within the hearts of its own people, not the endless corporate interests from around the world fleecing it for all it's worth.

Tech will not save us. It will not save Africa, that massive continent everyone talks about as if it were a single country; it will not end poverty. The reason we talk about these things in this way is to enrich the value of corporate interests, who throw around capital not to empower the downtrodden, but to generate more capital off of the backs of the downtrodden. Until we learn to move past this mode of discourse, this collective delusion of technocratic theocracy, we are forever doomed to repeat the cycle. ♦

Jeff Kunzler is an independent writer and graphic designer in New York City. This article is reproduced from AlterNet (alternet.org).

As Haiti grapples with the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew after a succession of other calamities, and with Christmas on the horizon, the following poem, written in 1945 by one of the country's greatest poets *Rene Depestre* (b. 1926), assumes a new tragic significance.

Friend, this is your Christmas

Rene Depestre

There is no
Baby Jesus Christmas-time
for dirty hands
for tattered clothes
for empty eyes
for gazes hanging on the baker's loaves.

For the sneering smile of poverty
on gaping lips
there is no
Baby Jesus Christmas-time
for the darkness of hovels
for the cold hard bed of pain
for the lack of blankets
for the paradox of slaving for your bread
for the crime of the salary-man
for all that underground humanity
that you would lighten with your firebrand words.

No, no my friend
the Christmas-time of gleaming shops
of pretty toys
of low-necked gowns
of dancing midnight revels
of cannon-shots
of stupid sermons
of starch-collared gentlemen
who wear away the future of your children
of merrymaking in the fine big houses
no, if the poor little child of Bethlehem
chose this day to be born
in the heady swirl of dizzying dances
Christmas-time is not for you.

Your Christmas-time, my friend
lies sleeping in your conscience
in your bitterness
in your hopes
in all your question-marks
that stand before the world they made for you
in the overflowing torrent of your hatreds long held back.

Translated from the French by Norman R Shapiro

Third World Gallery

Wall of mirrors: Sanaa, Yemen.

Credit: Tim Smith/Panos