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## A unified people's agenda to combat climate change

By convening the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, the plurinational government of Bolivia set the stage for a transcendental political event: social movements representing an extraordinary range of sectors collectively formulated a unified agenda of their own, with a radical stance towards climate change – radical because it focused on the root of the problem. This unity was also the result, undoubtedly, of the maturation of a lengthy process of integration among diverse social movements, in the search for strategies aimed at a genuine solution not only to the problem of climate change, but also to the various crises facing the world – the energy crisis, food crisis, financial crisis, loss of biodiversity, etc. – which merely serve to highlight a major structural crisis.

The People's Agreement of Cochabamba, the final declaration which summarizes the conclusions reached by 17 working groups made up of anyone who chose to register for and attend the conference, reaffirms that it is not enough to discuss climate change “as a problem limited to the rise in temperature;” the time has come to question the cause.

In this regard, all of the conclusions reached by the working groups concur with the position that the People's Agreement states in this way: “We confront the terminal crisis of a civilizing model that is patriarchal and based on the submission and destruction of human beings and nature that accelerated since the industrial revolution.” The capitalist system, with its logic of limitless growth, has led the Earth's regenerative capacity to be exceeded by more than 30%, and if this current rate of over-exploitation continues, the world will require the resources of two planets by 2030, concluded the members of Working Group 2: “Harmony with Nature to Live Well”.

For its part, Working Group 1 on “Structural Causes of Climate Change” stressed that every alternative to the current capitalist model “must lead to a profound transformation of civilization. Without this profound transformation, it will not be possible to continue life on planet Earth. Humanity is faced with a huge dilemma: continue down the road of capitalism, patriarchy, Progress and death, or embark on the path of harmony with nature and respect for life.”

Harmony, integration, interdependence, complementarity, equity and justice are concepts repeated throughout the conclusions of the different working groups. The need to preserve (for some), recover or find (for others) a tie of belonging to nature, to Mother Earth, is a constant. Mother Earth is a living being, with rights. In recognition of this, Working Group 3: “Mother Earth Rights” formulated a draft Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth. Article 1 defines Mother Earth as a living being with inherent rights, which are outlined in Article 2, while Article 3 of the declaration establishes the obligations of human beings to Mother Earth.

This living Earth has sons and daughters who have lived in harmony with her for thousands of years. Their wisdom and spirituality are intrinsically linked to Mother Earth, and they suffer the assaults against her in the flesh. “The aggression towards Mother Earth and the repeated assaults and violations against our soils, air, forests, rivers, lakes, biodiversity, and the cosmos are assaults against us. (...) Our territories are not respected, particularly those of peoples in voluntary isolation or

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initial contact, and we suffer the most terrible aggression since colonization only to facilitate the entry of markets and extractive industries,” declared the members of Working Group 7: “Indigenous Peoples”.

But in addition to denunciations like these, the indigenous peoples also have a great deal to contribute. They have their own knowledge, technologies and ancestral wisdom that they propose to be incorporated into curricula and teaching methods. And they have their concept of “Living Well”, which Working Group 9: “Shared Vision” describes as follows: “The shared vision is a world in which all people ‘live well’ in harmony with Mother Earth and other human beings. (...) The shared vision of ‘living well’ is of societies that respect the principles of interdependency and responsibility and therefore practice reciprocity, complementarity, solidarity, equity and live in harmony with Mother Earth and each other. It is a global society of peoples and social movements, who stand in solidarity to change the system that is putting the planet in peril. This change will come from revaluing traditional knowledge that respects nature in all parts of the planet.”

But this change will also come when those responsible for the problem honour their responsibilities. In order to sufficiently stabilize greenhouse gas emissions so as to limit the rise in global temperature to no more than 1%, the wealthy industrialized countries, who have colonized the planet’s atmosphere, must effectively reduce their own emissions, without the use of carbon markets. Working Group 10 on “The Kyoto Protocol and Emission Reduction Commitments” stresses: “The emission reductions of developed countries must be achieved domestically, without the use of carbon markets or any other offsetting mechanisms that allows them to avoid the adoption of real measures to reduce emissions.” The group calls for a thorough review of the market mechanisms created by the Kyoto Protocol itself, which have allowed the industrialized countries of the North, who are primarily responsible for the “slow death of Planet Earth,” to evade their real obligations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

These countries, which account for only 20% of the world’s population, “have appropriated the Earth’s atmospheric space by emitting the vast majority of historical greenhouse gas emissions,” thereby accumulating a considerable climate debt. Working Group 8, which specifically addressed the “Climate Debt”, underlined that honoring this debt does not depend “merely on financial compensation, but on restorative justice – on ‘making whole’ those people and members of the community of life on Earth.” The group declares that the responsibility lies not only with the industrialized countries of the North, but also transnational corporations and financial speculators who “also bear responsibility to compensate for the disasters that they provoked.”

Among other measures, the group calls on the so-called “developed” countries to fulfil their responsibilities by “altering their patterns of life and development, immediately cancelling external debt, stopping the production of armaments, shifting from fossil energy to renewable energy, and changing the international financial, economic and social systems that perpetuate the current patterns.”

Clearly absent from this list are the false solutions offered by carbon market mechanisms, which were condemned in the final conclusions of numerous working groups. In particular, Working Group 15: “Dangers of the Carbon Market” declares that the absolute failure of the carbon market is undeniable, given that “greenhouse gases emissions (GHG) have increased by 11.2% within developed countries from 1990 to 2007.” In the meantime, the world has witnessed a financial crisis which merely serves to prove that “the market is unable to regulate the financial system which is fragile and insecure due to speculation and the rise of intermediaries.” This leads to an obvious conclusion: that “it would be totally irresponsible to leave the very existence of humanity and our

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Mother Earth under their care and protection.”

The carbon market working group also rejected other false solutions, such as nuclear energy, transgenic crops, geo-engineering, mega infrastructure projects, agrofuels, and changes in land use that entail the destruction of existing ecosystems for their replacement by large-scale tree plantations of fast-growing alien species (eucalyptus, pine, acacia, etc.) that would purportedly serve as “carbon sinks”. On this latter point, Working Group 14: “Forests” is eminently clear: “Tree plantations under CDM (Clean Development Mechanism) within the Kyoto Protocol framework are a false solution that threatens native forests and jungles and violates Peoples’ rights. Plantations for carbon credits as well as for agrofuels are a false solution to climate change.” The same group forcefully spoke out against the attempt to incorporate forests into the carbon market: “We condemn neoliberal market mechanisms such as the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) mechanism and its + and ++ versions, which are violating our Peoples’ sovereignty and right to free, prior and informed consent; as well as the sovereignty of national States. This mechanism is violating the rights, uses, and customs of the Peoples and the Rights of Nature.”

It continues, “We demand instead that contaminating countries acknowledge their historical ecological and climate debt, and transfer financial and technological resources directly to the Peoples, nations and ancestral indigenous, aborigine, and peasant organic structures so they can restore and maintain forests and jungles. Thus can real funding of plans for a comprehensive life and for living well be ensured with direct compensation, in addition to the funding committed by developed countries, outside the carbon market, and never used as offsets of the carbon market.”

“The future of humanity is in danger,” the People’s Agreement concludes, “and we cannot allow a group of leaders from developed countries to decide for all countries as they tried unsuccessfully to do at the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen. This decision concerns us all. Thus, it is essential to carry out a global referendum or popular consultation on climate change in which all are consulted regarding the following issues: the level of emission reductions on the part of developed countries and transnational corporations, financing to be offered by developed countries, the creation of an International Climate Justice Tribunal, the need for a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, and the need to change the current capitalist system.”

With this agenda as a foundation, social movements can continue building a genuine solution to the climate change problem and an alternative to the system that has given rise to it.

The documents cited are available at the official People’s Conference website: <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/>

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