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People in the Americas build their own Summits

*By Adolfo Perez Esquivel**

Humanity entered into the 21st Century through cracks in a scenario of wars, violence and conflict generated by social exclusion, poverty, hunger and inequalities, conditions imposed by the dominant powers that have created a globalized totalitarianism.

As a counterpoint to this scenario consider people's global will to resist; to stand up to these challenges while simultaneously looking to forge new alternatives for humanity.

Though dominant neo-liberalism is flagging, it still seeks to exacerbate differences where it can while pushing policies that exclude two-thirds of humankind, all to prop up the system built to sustain their economic, political and military interests. A pivotal point for this model is that of cultural domination as exercised by powerful monopolies controlling the means to communicate, which in effect is killing freedom of the press while installing freedom for the corporations, which aren't synonymous.

Multinational corporations control most means of communication, be they radio stations, television or the printed press. Power over the dissemination of information is concentrated in 4 or 5 large international corporations and they inform through disinformation, by manipulating people's consciences.

Out of popular expressions of cultural resistance have come antibodies to fight the plague of control over information. It is being accomplished through using alternative media, community radio, networked links and electronic pages – the alternative printed press and other means of communication side by side with key embryonic initiatives in Latin America such as TELESUR, all of which promote openness while trying to end the control over information.

Many peoples' initiatives are sprouting up all over the world. The World Social Forum along with other forums focusing on specific themes open space for resistance and participation that in turn generate solidarity networks capable of addressing wide spread needs and problems. Out of this has also arisen a strong commitment to hold the III Peoples' Summit in Mar del Plata, Argentina November 1-5. It represents a continent-wide effort to open up spaces for participation and debate, as is happening in many other countries in the world.

Parallel to the III Peoples' Summit will be the IV Summit of the Americas involving the hemisphere's heads of state with the notable exception of Fidel Castro, a condition imposed by the U.S. government headed up by George Bush. It's a long and sorry tale of weak-kneed governments lacking the courage to confront the immoral and permanent aggression visited on Cuba by successive U.S. governments that act with impunity.

The III Peoples' Summit is working to develop alternative proposals to the dominant neo-liberal paradigm. Among the topics for discussion is the status of the FTAA (the Free trade Area of the Americas) that if implemented would lead to recolonization in the Americas, where agricultural subsidies for U.S. producers have to be accepted but at the same time made an impossibility for other countries in the region. The 'free market' they trumpet is nothing more than an empty slogan, since in reality the wealthy nations want to control both prices and the pace of economic development.

One of the key debates at the Peoples' Summit will be the growing militarization in Latin

America following the installation of more U.S. bases following a strategy of 'triangulation'. It is based on: Plan Puebla-Panama which aims to control resource production in Central America and the Caribbean; Plan Colombia where U.S. military advisors and Colombian mercenary and military forces are fighting the guerilla and other opposition; a growing military presence elsewhere in South America. The installation for example of a U.S. military base in Manta, Ecuador (that was authorized by the government of Jamil Mahuad) opens up the question of control in the Andean region and on the Pacific coast. The final leg in the triangular strategy being quietly put in place is the recent arrival of U.S. troops in Paraguay (these troops have been given total immunity from prosecution during their stay there). It is critical to be able to analyze the consequences for the continent of unchallenged U.S. military dominance.

Another key area for discussion at the Peoples' Summit is that of the External Debt, a mechanism of domination and conditionality imposed by the likes of the IMF, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the WTO, and which is a mechanism that is used to force privatizations of State enterprises leading to a loss of national sovereignty, a conditioning of peoples' livelihoods and a curtailment of their right to determine their own development directions.

In Mar del Plata there will also be a series of forums focusing on specific areas such as education. The First Nations will be discussing cultural diversity, their languages and problems occurring on indigenous lands, and shortcomings in public policy. Human rights organizations will be talking about the theme of impunity, about rights as contained in Peoples Truth and Justice – economic, social and cultural rights to their fullest expression. Rights for women, children, environmental concerns, and one of humanity's major worries, water. Existing regional accords will be reviewed and a focus put on the need to strengthen mechanisms and programmes leading to a new vision for regional and continental integration.

This Summit will provide an opportunity to build on the concept of participatory democracy. A major problem to be addressed has to deal with the fact the scourge of neoliberalism has meant the under-resourcing of key social programmes that in turn has led to a greater incidence of hunger and poverty. Public policies need to be redirected to ensure a redistribution of resources to the affected population.

Some of the big media empires that control and manipulate information such as the Clarin group, the La Nacion newspaper and others, have adopted a policy of trying to associate the III Peoples' Summit with violence, seeking in this way to sow uncertainty and fear in the public in the face of 'possible' acts of violence during U.S. President George Bush's time on Argentinean soil. This type of coverage obscures the Peoples Summit's real objectives of encouraging broad based proposals. Big media interests are acting to impose a hidden form of censorship through creating doubts related to the Peoples' Summit.

The Argentine government is going to spend 120 million pesos to provide security for the Summit of the Presidents, and in particular to protect George Bush. Official paranoia has reached such levels that local personnel in the hotel where Bush is scheduled to stay have all been replaced with personnel brought from the U.S.A. A broad 'zone of exclusion' with control systems, is being set up that will impact on the inhabitants of Mar del Plata, who will have their freedom of mobility limited by a pass system. Businesses within the zone will have to close down completely while the Presidents are in town. Sharp-shooters will be in strategic roof top locations. We could say that on those days, Mar del Plata will be a city under siege.

The III Peoples Summit has meeting spaces already approved outside the 'zone of exclusion' which are the covered sports complex and installations of the National University of Mar del Plata.

The organizers for Mar del Plata are hard at work to cover requirements for lodging, food etc. for the more than 10 thousand people expected to attend the Peoples Summit.

One concern related to the forums and workshops has to do with guarantees for the security and normal functioning of the Peoples' Summit, a responsibility that logically belongs to the Argentine government.

The 4th of November will see large scale mobilizations to denounce the policies of President Bush, such as the wars and other conflicts that have made the world a more unstable and violent place. The CTA (Argentine Workers Central) have called for a national work stoppage to protest Bush's presence on Argentine soil, to denounce his warmongering, and the wars now being fought that have cost thousands of lives in Afghanistan and Iraq thanks to military action by the U.S. and its allies.

We have to speak with one voice and say NO to terrorisms no matter where they come from. NO to State terrorism and NO to economic terrorism, as well as NO to mechanisms of domination that are part of the external debt provisions, are built into privatizations, and that underpin the FTAA.

It is our hope that our cry, like the cry of all those who have been excluded, will be heard by government leaders.

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