

## **RIO minus 20: A CALL FOR GLOBAL GRASSROOTS ACTION**

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 13 to June 22. The Conference was a 20-year follow-up to the historic 1992 Earth Summit which resulted in landmark treaties on the environment including the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21, and the Convention on Biological Diversity. However, rather than extending the gains made at the Earth Summit, Rio+20 has been widely condemned as an abject failure and a missed lifetime opportunity. Although attended by some 190 heads of state and dignitaries and more than 50,000 people from over 180 nations, the developed nations at the Conference abandoned their responsibilities and forced their regressive report, “The Future We Want,” upon the body, ignoring the years of efforts by the 13,000 participating NGOs.

Particularly outraged were the developing nations and NGOs representing the interests of the poor, women, and small farmers. Any mention of reproductive rights and population control in the final report was vetoed by the Vatican. Addressing the assembly, Cuban President Raul Castro referred back to a statement given by Fidel Castro to the Earth Summit twenty years earlier – that “an important biological species is at risk of disappearing due to the rapid and progressive liquidation of its natural living conditions: humanity” and noted that “what could have been considered alarmist, today constitutes an irrefutable reality.” Kumi Naidoo, Executive Director of Greenpeace International, called the 53-page report the “longest suicide note in history.” Bolivian President Evo Morales told the delegates that “capitalism is a form of colonialism” and that “commercializing natural resources is a form of colonizing southern countries, which carry on their shoulders the responsibility to protect the environment, which was destroyed by the north.” Prominent activist Vandana Shiva carried with her 100,000 signatures from India which she handed to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in support of the Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth. She decried the Conference as an undesirable U-turn in the midst of global environmental crisis. “It will be remembered for offering a bailout for a failing economic system through the ‘green economy’ – a code phrase for the commodification and financialisation of nature. ... This is the last contest between a life-destroying worldview of man’s empire over earth and a life-protecting worldview of harmony with nature and recognition of the rights of Mother Earth.”

Addressing the opening of the high level segment of Rio+20, the NGO “major groups” representative exposed the failure of the draft report and presented a protest petition from civil society, “The Future We Don’t Want.” <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/the-future-we-dont-want/>. Near the end of the Conference, hundreds outraged delegates from civil society “Occupied” Rio+20 with a vocal general assembly at the delegates entrance and staged a mass walk-out surrendering their badges with chants of “The Future We Want Is Not Here!” The walk-out followed a mass demonstration of some 80,000 protestors against the summit fiasco a few days earlier.

Many of the demonstrators came from a two-week long “alternative” People’s Summit, also hosted by the Brazilian government, that drew tens of thousands of progressive activists from around the world to do what the governments at Rio+20 were not – discussing in hundreds of workshops and meetings real problems and real solutions to our global environmental crisis. Using the People’s Summit as a platform and the internet, the People’s Summit opened up to civil society the drafting of “sustainability treaties” and issued a final declaration of solidarity and mass grass-roots action. <http://www.sustainabilitytreaties.org> and <http://rio20.net/en/propuestas/final-declaration-of-the-people%E2%80%99s-summit-in-rio-20>.

The Rio+20 Major Group on Children and Youth issued the following closing statement to the assembled world leaders in response to the UN report:

I want you to imagine a generation that has been damned, imagine children deprived of a world without war, imagine a community where human beings are slaves to fellow beings and where disease and hunger are the order of the day. That is the future we warned you of in 92 and that future, is today.

If these sheets of paper are our common future, then you have sold our fate and subsidised our common destruction.

Where was our voice, the voice of our children and grandchildren in this? How can you listen to them in the future if you did not show the will to create the space now.

We have one planet. Our being, our thinking, and our action should not be constrained by national boundaries but by planetary ones. You failed to liberate yourself from national and corporate self-interest and recognise our need to respect a greater more transcendental set of boundaries.

We came here to celebrate our generation. We have danced, and dreamed, and cried on the streets of Rio and found something to believe in. You have chosen not to celebrate with us.

(Calmly-change of pace) You were supposed to show leadership. It was not just your job merely to seek consensus. It was your job to commit, show ambition and to lead. You have failed.

You have worked hard to close a deal. So, if any of you think this document is the ambitious, action-oriented outcome you said you wanted please stand up.

If you are unable to stand up, then you must be unwilling to move forward.

So we will move forward for you.

We know this:

We need intergenerational cooperation.

We need innovation and creativity.

We need to embrace the values of sustainability, equity, justice and respect for human rights.

We need to recognise that material resources are finite, but human potential is not.

So get out of our way and..

We will create strong global institutions

We will create new paradigms of wealth and prosperity

We will act as the voice for future generations, one( that you so wilfully ignored.

We will stand united beyond borders and bridge the national interests that divide us

We will implement what you have not.

We are moving forward decisively with action. We are not deterred.

--Rio de Janeiro, Brazil - June 22, 2012

Andrew Reid attended the Rio+20 and the People's Summit for the IADL and the National Lawyers Guild.