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Introduction

THE institutions of governance are in crisis. At every level - whether it's national governments, the G7, the United Nations or ASEAN - politicians and policy makers are unable to respond to the insecurity, inequality and instability created by the economic and political forces of globalisation. The crisis is simply too big and, besides, any solution would require a wrenching break from their ideological moorings. And, in the absence of ideas, they hope - like Alan Greenspan - for a soft landing.

Although it may seem reductive to trace the current political situation back to the Asian financial crisis, there is no doubt that these events pushed the defenders of neo-liberalism onto the back foot, and they have not been able to recover. The dominant paradigm of growth without equity has been dealt a body blow, and globalisation faces a crisis of legitimacy. But, as the recently released UNRISD report 'Visible Hands: Taking Responsibility for Social Development' observes "... this enabling ideological shift is one of the major gains in the latter half of the century." (1)

This shift has created a moment of great potential, where the balance of forces is no longer conclusively in favour of the elite. Across the world, local, national and international coalitions and movements, academics and unionists, journalists and NGOs, and even some governments, are opposing the dominant system and proposing alternatives. This is where the energy and ideas can be found.

In this issue of Focus on Trade, we look at the latest failures of the G7, the UN and ASEAN, and at some sources of hope in the search for alternatives to "savage neoliberalism."

(1) This report is available through the website www.unrisd.org, or by writing to UNRISD, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. It's worth reading.

'Son of a commoner' faces the Assembly of the Poor

by Wipaphan Korkeatkachorn*

On the night of the Buddhist Lent on July 16 and in the afternoon of the following day, 223 villagers including the elderly, women and a child were arrested at Government House in Bangkok.

These people have been adversely affected by the Pak Mun dam. They are also members of the Assembly of the Poor, the strongest people's organization in Thailand that advocates the plight of desperate people affected by the so-called "development" policies. Before the arrest, the police beat several of the people and all of them were accused of trespassing on government property by climbing into Government House. Although representatives of the Assembly of the Poor have camped in front of Government House time and again to demand their constitutional rights, their demands have fallen on deaf ears.

For Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, a lawyer who always calls himself a son of a commoner, a Buddhist Lent was no occasion to refrain from dealing strictly with those who didn't follow his "principle" and obey the "rules of law".

"I sympathise with the police, they (the villagers) have the right to demonstrate outside, but they should not enter Government House.... The intrusion into the compound is illegal," said Chuan. While the Prime Minister regarded the villagers' intrusion into Government House as illegal, Dr Prawes Wasi, a prominent senior citizen, saw the incident differently. The villagers' trespass, in his opinion, was a very minor issue compared with the Government's intrusion - through its top-down development projects - into the villagers' lives nationwide. Such intrusion of the state has brought about the villagers' poverty, desperation, illness, family disintegration and the selling of their daughters into prostitution.

Professor Nidhi lawsriwong, Thailand's well-known historian, pointed out that the well-to-do Thai Chamber of Commerce was very welcome to use the government's compound to bargain for their interests with the Ministry of Commerce, but when the poor villagers attempted to do likewise they were man-handled. He added that a violent act includes not only hitting villagers with batons, but also means the refusal of their rights, wrenching their chances to make a living, and refusing to take one's responsibility to help solve other people's problems.

"The present situation is as worse as that of the May event (in 1991). We have a tyrant government that is arrogant and not accountable for the public. This is dangerous because the government still sees itself as legitimate and claims that it is democratic. In fact, it is as violent as a military government," said Nidhi.

Why did the villagers come back? The villagers climbed into the government house because they wanted to put pressure on the government to solve their problems according to the recommendations made by the ad hoc committee appointed by the government on June 2, 2000.

On May 15, 2000 the Pak Mun villagers blocked the turbine engine to stop the operation of Pak Mun dam, which is managed by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT). They demanded that the government open the dam gates for four months to allow fish to swim up river to spawn, as fish species have been disappearing ever since the completion of the dam in 1994.

The siege of the dam lasted for two weeks until, on June 2, the Chuan-led coalition government decided to set up a neutral committee to study and offer solutions to the problems. The committee consisted of ten members: five from the nominations of the Assembly of the Poor and the remaining five from the nominations of the government.

During one month, the committee looked into two main and pressing problems of the Assembly of the Poor; the dams (both already constructed and on-going projects) and forest and land problems. Their major and short-term recommendations were: to open the gates both at Pak Mun and Rasi Salai dams; to stick to the implementation process of the cabinet's resolutions made previously by General Chavalit Yongchaiyudh's administration; to stop all on-going dam projects and conduct environmental impact assessments (EIAs); to pay compensation to villagers affected by Sirindhorn Dam and to review the present cabinet's resolution dated June 30, 1998 which will result in an eviction of many villagers living in forest areas. The committee handed its recommendations to the government on July 7, but there was no action.

On July 25, nine days after the beating and arrests of the villagers, the cabinet agreed to open the gates of Pak Mun and Rasi Salai dams but refused to pay compensation to more than 2,000 families affected by Sirindhorn Dam which was completed in 1972 nor did it review the June 30 cabinet resolution which has been used as a guideline in demarcating forest boundaries. While the government claimed they agreed to about 75 per cent of the recommendations, the Assembly of the Poor argued that only one has been fully implemented by the government.

Two days after the cabinet's response, more than 30 men and women started fasting to express their dissatisfaction. The number has now reached 300 and the hunger strike continues.

Chuan and the Poor After the financial crisis, the policies and measures used by the Chuan government "recover" Thailand's economy have become known as "catering for the rich and neglecting the poor". Moreover, his government's relationship with the poor is best described by a saying "Chuan comes, farmers die". During Chuan's two years and eight months in power, his government has a record of 50 lawsuits against the poor and 14 crackdowns of demonstrators.

Some analysts would rather describe Chuan's "principle" as "his own personal principle". There is a lot of evidence showing that he and his government are only accountable to international financial institutions, foreign investors, business sector and not the poor. While his government fast-tracked the process to pass 11 laws which benefit foreign investors by privatizing Thailand's last resources and nationalizing private sector debt to meet the IMF's conditions, he has never shown any interest in solving poor people's problems. And even when he does, he tackles them within the scope of existing laws and bureaucracy. Chuan's response to the Assembly of the Poor's demands this time shows, once again, how staunchly his policies "cater for the rich and neglect the poor".

Now, the Chuan government is being challenged not only by the Assembly of the Poor but also the pro-democracy movements. The boomerang is now turning. Almost three years ago, on Silom Road in the heart of Bangkok the middle-class people gathered to call for the dissolution of General Chavalit's government. Now it's Chuan's turn. The democracy groups, the Assembly of the Poor, NGOs and their sympathizers started their rally to call for Chuan government's dissolution on July 29. The call has already sparked responses in some of the provinces and likely to spread nationwide.

Time will tell whether the "principles" of the "son of a commoner" will stand the test of the people's power.

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The United Nations shows its true colours

by Nicola Bullard*

Kofi Annan's decision to cast his lot with the OECD, the IMF and the World Bank has thrown serious doubt on the UN's willingness to challenge the dominance of the institutions wholly owned and operated by the G7.

In his opening speech to the Geneva 2000 Forum on the eve of the UN General Assembly Special Session on Social Development (UNGASS) Mr Annan told the predominantly NGO audience that "people are poor not because of too much globalisation but too little." And, just to drive home the point, he added that private corporations are no less a part of civil society than NGOs; that the UN has made common cause not only with the World Bank and IMF but also with the OECD, and that if the Bretton Woods organisations, the OECD and the WTO "have pursued mistaken policies in the past, haven't we all at one time or another?"

And if anyone still believed that the UN could act as a counterweight to the Bretton Woods institutions after hearing Annan's speech, there was more to come: the UN's decision to co-sign a report launched for the UNGASS alongside the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD, the failure of the UNGASS to address the massive contradictions in the global economic and political system and, finally, the launching of the UN's 'Global Compact' with nearly fifty major transnational corporations.

"Bretton Woods for All" The report that caused all the fuss 'A Better World for All' (and immediately dubbed 'A Bretton Woods for All') is little more than a glossy brochure indicating progress towards seven key international development targets. It is high on graphics and low on analysis. The content of the report is both superficial (one IMF economist said they were told it "had to be understood by high school students and government ministers") and predictable: very little progress has been made in the past five years, some countries have done better than others, and what we need is "faster, sustainable growth strategies that favour the poor."

Ho hum. In fact, the report is like so many other World Bank documents that it would barely have caused a ripple were it not for the fact that the Mr Annan's name appeared with Messrs. Johnston, Kohler and Wolfensohn (at least he was given alphabetical preference).

While UN staff tried to distance themselves from the report and the IMF stood by wondering what the fuss was all about, more than seventy UN-accredited NGOs demanded that the UN withdraw its endorsement of the report. The World Council of Churches was even tougher. In a public letter, WCC general secretary Dr Konrad Raiser accused Mr Annan of being party to a "propaganda exercise for international financial institutions whose policies are widely held to be at the root of many of the grave social problems facing the poor." He added that "considerable damage has been done to the credibility of the UN as the last real hope of the victims of globalisation."

Social Summit is downhill all the way The UN Special Session itself was cold comfort to the "victims of globalisation." The assessment of progress since the first social summit in Copenhagen five years ago was grim: the overall number of people living in statistical poverty has increased and in at least 30 countries the situation has gone backwards, including countries such as Thailand which had made tremendous progress in the previous decade.

And we should not expect much more in the next five years. When asked to list the achievements of the meeting, UN under-secretary Nitin Desai put setting a deadline to "halve the numbers living in extreme poverty by 2015" at the top of his list, yet there are no binding commitments and no new resources. If this is the measure of success, perhaps the rest can be judged a failure.

In the details, however, there were some small gains. The paragraph 111(e) bis on "developing new and innovative sources of funding" opens the door for further discussions on currency transactions taxes (a Tobin Tax) and, even more significantly, the declaration contains two paragraphs (10 and 10[bis]) which legitimise both debtor moratorium (debt standstill) and capital controls.

But the striking characteristic of the official event was its lack of vision. Delegates were dispirited, knowing that these negotiations were being made in the context of an unprecedented global crisis. The govern-

ments and international institutions responsible for development have lost their legitimacy, uncontrolled and volatile financial markets threaten economic, political and social progress, and inter and intra country relations are marked by deep and destabilising power imbalances. The international political and economic system is in crisis, yet no one dares grasp the nettle of globalisation and name its contradictions and failures. All we get is “globalisation with a human face.”

Corporations with a human face Under the banner of the UN, fifty top transnational corporations (including Shell, Nike and Novartis) have signed on to a charter of nine principles covering human rights, workers rights and the environment. Each year they will be asked to post (on a website of course) examples of their progress in these areas. International NGOs such as Amnesty International, the ICFTU, World Wide Fund for Nature and Human Rights Watch will then respond (also via the website) thus creating a “structured dialogue” between corporations and labour and human rights groups which could be a “powerful force for change.” (A list of supporting corporations and international NGOs can be found at www.coprwatch.org/trac/globalization/un)

The compact was denounced by intellectuals, progressive activists and NGO leaders, including many from the South. Their letter to Kofi Annan (available on the same website) challenges the assumption that markets have a central role and criticizes the non-binding nature of the compact, saying that “many corporations would like nothing better than to wrap themselves in the flag of the United Nations to ‘bluwash’ their public image.”

Although progressive groups and some Third World governments have expressed grave concerns at the UN’s direction, these are not simply public relations blunders. The UN is systematically realigning itself to the corporate sector, the US and the Bretton Woods institutions. Given that UN’s agenda, language and programmes have already been hijacked by the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, those at the top have made the pragmatic choice: “if you can’t beat them, join them.”

G7 fails (again) At their 26th Summit in Okinawa, the G7 again provided ample evidence of their staggering capacity to waste money (\$750 million) and create the illusion of purposeful action while doing absolutely nothing.

Their final communique includes meaningless statements on almost every safe issue. For example, the section on information technology: “IT empowers, benefits and links people all over the world, allows global citizens to express themselves and know and respect one another... [it] enhances public welfare, promotes stronger cohesion and thus allows democracy to flourish.” In fact, the qualities they attribute to IT read like the label on a jar of snake oil, which promises to cure everything from hair loss to peptic ulcers. Don’t they read the Financial Times? Don’t they see the headlines of mega-mergers between mobile phone companies, the astronomical bids for broadband licences and the soaring price of IT stocks? All this activity is based on future expected profits and it seems extremely unlikely (and even naïve) to imagine that the benefits of this technology will be shared with anyone who can’t afford the market price.

On debt, the G7 failed completely. The Jubilee 2000 campaigns which last year were prepared to take a chance with the Enhanced HIPC Initiative have now denounced it as a “tool for delaying debt cancellation.” In their strongest statement to date, an extremely broad base of Jubilee campaigns demanded the cancellation of illegitimate and unpayable debt, delinking structural adjustment and other conditions from debt cancellation, and that the G7 cease to function as “judge, jury and party” in the debt cancellation process. They also pledged to take their message to the IMF and World Bank meetings in Prague.

The Economist's assessment of the G7 summit ('Global economic summit promises much and delivers nothing,' 29 July) concludes by asking "How about abandoning this sorry exercise altogether?" It's not often that we agree with The Economist, but what an altogether excellent idea!

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The Association of Southeast Asian Nations: a Preliminary Autopsy

by Walden Bello*

Four years ago, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) seemed well on the way to becoming a real economic bloc. Today, it is in danger of joining such august predecessors as Maphilindo (Malaysia-Philippines-Indonesia) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (Seato) in the proverbial dustbin of history.

The speeches at the opening of the organization's 33rd Annual Meeting in Bangkok on July 24 had a distinct "I-have-come-to-bury- Asean, not-to-praise-it" note to them. Thai Prime Minister Chuan Leek-Pai warned of the association's rapidly falling behind other regional economic blocs in global trade. But it was Singapore Foreign Minister S. Jayakumar who best captured Asean's near-terminal state when he described it as being stuck with the image of a "sunset organization" in international circles.

Many observers agreed with Jayakumar's characterization, although some questioned whether it was appropriate for Singapore to lay out this assessment in its usual self-righteous fashion since the city-state has contributed to Asean's disarray by profiting from the financial plight of its neighbors, in particular Indonesia and Malaysia.

Currency Crisis Again Accentuating the funereal mood at the meeting was the backdrop of renewed economic crisis in the region, which saw foreign investors and currency speculators savage the region's currencies. The baht fell to a nine month low at the opening of the meeting on July 24. A week earlier, the Indonesian rupiah hit a 21 month low and the Philippine peso registered a 20 month low, prompting Philippine President Joseph Estrada to warn of a repeat of the 1997 financial crisis during his State of the Nation address in Manila.

A sign of Asean's all-talk-and-no-act show is that at no point in the current currency crisis has there been any serious effort to activate the regional currency swap arrangements that the Asean countries agreed to set up with Japan, South Korea, and China during the Asian Development Bank annual meeting in Chiang Mai, Thailand, last May. The scheme essentially pooled reserves that could be drawn on to support a country's currency if it was subjected to speculative attack. If ever there was a time to test this so-called "firewall" against financial crisis, it was in the last two weeks.

Afta Unravels Like currency stabilization scheme, Asean's blueprint for regional integration, the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta), is falling apart. For the six founding members of Asean, free trade was intended to be fully effective by 2002, with Vietnam achieving the same status by 2006, Laos and Myanmar in 2008, and Cambodia by 2010. Now there are doubts that the six founding members will be able to meet their schedule.

Even before the financial crisis, governments had earmarked sensitive farm products for exemption from the implementation schedule, resulting in what observers jokingly described as "mile-long" exclusion lists. But, to many, the nail in the coffin of the 30-year-old dream to build a regional bloc was Malaysia's strong opposition to liberalizing its auto industry, which forced other Afta members to allow it last May to keep its high tariffs on car imports until 2005. Following Malaysia's move, other countries have pushed to extend their deadlines-a fact reflected in the joint statement issued at the end of this year's ministerial meeting that rules were being worked out to allow countries "experiencing real difficulties" to temporarily withdraw "sensitive" products from the Afta schedule. Some founding governments are reportedly opting for pushing the advent of regional free trade to 2010.

The desire to push back the free-trade deadline seems to stem from a desire to protect domestic economies that are still reeling from the 1997 crisis. It is, however, unlikely that this is the only or even the main reason. There are clearly other factors at play. One is that the spur towards preferential regional trade that was provided by the competition from Apec (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) has disappeared with the demise of that grouping as a serious trade body. During its apogee in the mid-1990s, Apec threatened to become a formal free trade area covering the area from San Francisco to Auckland. The establishment of Afta in 1992 and its reinvigoration in 1996 clearly was a direct response to APEC. Had there been serious movement on the Apec 2020 Plan, the whole Asean project of preferential regional trade and economic cooperation would have been rendered irrelevant.

Equally important is the fact that different governments had different visions of regional free trade. Some, like Philippines and Singapore, where free market views dominate among trade technocrats, saw the reduction of tariffs regionally as a step towards eventual integration into a global free trade system. Others, like Indonesia and to some extent Malaysia, saw regional preferential trade as creating a large, protected regional market that would stimulate regional industrialization via import substitution.

Asean-EU Contrast Related to these conflicting visions was the failure to accompany the plan for regional free trade with strategies for regional economic integration in industry and agriculture. The purpose of such arrangements would have been to ensure that for each and every country, the benefits from greater market integration would be greater than the costs. It was the presence of industrial and agricultural planning that made the difference in Europe, that gained the adherence of European governments to regional free trade. Indeed, in the European case, transborder industrial planning in the form of the European Coal and Steel Community preceded the establishment of the Common Market in 1957. Moreover, as analyst George Ross has pointed out, the Common Market “was a circumscribed and protected playing field for trade, involving the pooling of limited, carefully chosen areas of sovereignty, designed less to transcend national sovereignty than to help EU member states pursue national growth strategies.” In other words, regional arrangements did not diminish but enhanced national economic capabilities—something that Asean members do not see in Afta.

This is not to say that industrial policy schemes did not exist. There have been several, from the Asean Industrial Projects to the Asean Industrial Complementation Scheme (AICO). It has been local industries and governments that have taken advantage of these arrangements, however, but Japanese car manufacturers like Toyota and Isuzu which see AICO, for instance, as a means to integrate their regional operations for maximum penetration of the different national markets.

Indeed, in the current economic crisis, a strategic industrial policy tool like AICO has been degraded into an inventory-reduction scheme by Isuzu. According to Marc Castellano of the Japan Economic Institute, the auto manufacturer has used AICO to “establish a flexible truck-supply scheme...that would enable the company to distribute its large-sized truck inventory among Asean countries to meet changing trends in demand. Asean countries charge a 33 per cent levy on assembled vehicles imported from Japan but only a 5 per cent duty on those coming from other association members. Upon approval, Isuzu, for example, could ship trucks made at its Thailand plant to Indonesia, where the demand for trucks is recovering. Most importantly, the swap plan will help reduce inventories, which remain excessive as a result of the economic crisis.”

Asean’s Achilles Heel As the Asean economic project unravels, one of the things that emerges is the absence of any significant constituency for it, except perhaps for fractions of the technocrat and industrial elites in each country. This is another manifestation of the democratic deficit in Asean, which is now turning out to be its Achilles Heel. Regional economic integration has remained something that has been tossed around only among the region’s elites, and because it lacks a mass constituency, there is no other engine to push it once political will among the elites falters. Few people in Asean will miss AFTA when its corpse is finally interred. Indeed, few will miss Asean, which will probably be footnoted by future historians as the regional elite club during Southeast Asia’s pre-democratic period.

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Venezuelan Elections Offer Hope of Real Reform

by Mark Weisbrot*

The electoral victory of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez on Sunday, greeted with celebration by the country's poor majority, may have implications beyond Venezuela's borders.

Chavez' "revolution from above" is in many ways a logical response to the last 20 years of Latin American attempts at social change. In countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala in the 1980s, activists organized grassroots movements of peasants, laborers, and religious "base communities." They were slaughtered mercilessly by death squads and allied militaries that had nearly unlimited support from Washington.

So it is not surprising that Chavez would begin with an effort to consolidate power. But his popularity among the citizenry runs deep.

This can be seen by their continued loyalty in the face of adversity. The Venezuelan economy shrank by 7.2% last year—a severe contraction by any standard—yet the voters have stood by him in a referendum, a Constituent Assembly, the ratification of a new Constitution, and now the approval of a new six-year term. For comparison, just look what happened to George Bush, Sr. when he had the misfortune to run for re-election on the heels of a relatively mild recession here, or Jimmy Carter in the recession of 1980.

So why are so many Venezuelans so willing to give Chavez a fresh mandate to cure the country's ills? Probably because they believe that he is honest and trying to do what is best for them. He has cleaned up corruption in the judiciary and tackled prison reform, and created new constitutional rights for the country's indigenous people. He has begun to mobilize the armed forces to help with the provision of social services. His overall economic program is less clear, but at least he is talking about alternatives to the policies that have caused a steady decline in per capita income over the last two decades.

For now, Chavez reminds us, the Venezuelan revolution has been carried out "without a single drop of blood." Recently an Army captain formed a "patriotic junta" dedicated to removing the President, and admitted to Newsweek that his group had discussed killing the president as an option. In the United States this would carry a serious, possibly lifelong prison term—but Captain Garcia Morales was merely dismissed.

Such efforts to avoid violent confrontation and repression have won Chavez no friends in the US foreign policy establishment. They seem to have more sympathy with the government of Colombia, where peasants, labor leaders, and even human rights workers are routinely murdered with impunity.

In some ways we are witnessing a replay of Central America in the 1980s, with Colombia as El Salvador, and America pouring in billions of dollars to escalate a war against an insurgency it can never defeat. Venezuela is playing the role of Nicaragua—a popular, left-of-center, nationalist government struggling to survive and fulfill its promises to the poor.

The dominoes are bigger this time around, and Washington knows it. Its "savage neoliberalism"—as Chavez describes trickle-down economics—has failed not only the poor, but also the average household in Latin America for two decades now. Since 1980, income per person has hardly grown at all in the entire continent.

In most countries, political change has been held in check by despair and cynicism. So if the Chavez government can provide hope with an alternative that improves people's lives, there's no telling what might happen.

The United States has a long and sordid history of destabilizing democratically elected governments that it doesn't like in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Clinton Administration has been relatively quiet about Chavez so far, apparently hoping that capital flight and internal opposition from the wealthy and a hostile news media will suffice to bring an end to his experiment. And indeed, over the last year, investors have taken an amount equal to about nine percent of the country's income out of the country.

Nonetheless we may soon see more pro-active strategies from Washington to undermine Venezuela's new deal. In the 1980s, our government spent billions to ruin Nicaragua's economy, through war and embargo. It never recovered: ten years after the ouster of the Sandinistas, Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the hemisphere.

The Venezuelans have six times as many people and the largest oil reserves outside the Middle East, so they have at least a fighting chance. Perhaps it is time for the millions of Americans who tried to stop our government from destroying Nicaragua to begin thinking about how to make sure that history does not repeat itself.

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Civil Society as Global Actor: Promise and Pitfalls

by Walden Bello

(This article came out in May 2000 in the Korean publication Hangyore Shimun.)

Today, there is much talk about the emergence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or civil society organizations (CSOs) as major international actors. CSOs have elicited criticism from some quarters. For instance, Martin Wolf, the columnist of the Financial Times, has called them “uncivil society” and attacked them for opposing the project of globalization advanced by the World Trade Organization, World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, saying that their stands on various issues stem from ignorance and simplistic interpretations of a complex world.

More liberal quarters, however, have acknowledged that their criticisms have some justification, for instance, on the issue of the dangers posed by genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and globalization. Both corporations and governments have moved to initiate “dialogue” with NGOs, oftentimes with the purpose of coopting them into corporate or government agendas by conceding some of their criticisms while rejecting others, particularly their more fundamental critiques of the processes of corporate globalization. The elite World Economic Forum that meets in Davos, Switzerland, every year now assigns top priority to consulting NGOs to ensure that the alleged benefits of globalization are spread more widely.

When we examine the problems and promises posed by civil society organizations (CSOs), an important thing to remember is that they are not invariably a progressive phenomenon. While we are familiar with CSOs that are liberal or belong to the left, the right also has its CSOs, such as business associations, trade groups, and conservative religious formations – for instance, the formidable Opus Dei in Catholic countries. Oftentimes, as influences on political and economic actors, these CSOs on the right are far more influential than CSOs on the left.

This influence is, however, sometimes not noticed because it is covertly exercised via the many different networks in which members of conservative CSOs participate. In contrast, progressive CSOs or NGOs are oftentimes more public and transparent, so that the press has an easier time chronicling their activities. Despite this greater visibility, however, the civil society organization of the right is generally much more influential than the civil society organization of the left. They are, to borrow Gramsci’s famous term, more “organic” to the class structure.

Promise of CSOs Having flagged this, one can now turn to the promise of progressive CSOs in the creation of a more just and equitable order at home and abroad.

First of all, CSOs are quickly emerging as a third or fourth actor in the formulation and implementation of macro-political and macro-economic decisions. In many Asian countries, for instance, real decisionmaking power used to be monopolized by politicians, technocrats, and the business elite. That is increasingly less and less possible in the face of the mass mobilization by labor groups, environmental groups, and human and social rights groups, often working in coalitions. Coordination, even of a rough sort, among a variety of CSOs, has become more pronounced after the Asian financial crisis, which underlined the hopeless corruption of the old order and the necessity of constantly monitoring and checking the old elites outside the usual governmental institutions and processes.

Second, CSOs are crucial not only as checks on elites. They are also the key to the evolution of democracy. Representative democracy has always suffered from what Rousseau saw as its tendency to develop a “corporate will” separate from the General Will, thus perverting the purposes of representation. The development of the US democratic system into a plutocratic system, where Republicans and Democrats in Congress have been subjugated by corporate money, is the best example of the Rosseauean dilemma of large-scale representative democracies.

With their constant pressure on bureaucrats and parliamentarians to be accountable, CSOs are a force for more democracy. By organizing the energies of millions of citizens to impinge on the daily political scene, CSOs are a force pushing the evolution of more direct forms of democratic rule. CSO activity, combined with advanced applications of information technology that allow citizens and citizens’ groups to instantaneously communicate with one another, may be the key to the emergence of direct democracy in

contemporary mass societies.

Finally, CSOs are a force for effective internationalism that can check the power of politically hegemonic forces like the US government and transnational corporations. The power of states and thus of counter-hegemonic alliances among states has been eroded by corporate-led globalization. But the combination of citizens' resistance to globalization and communications technology has created global citizens' movements that can assemble and meet the "enemy" at a moment's notice. The "Battle of Seattle" in November 1999 and, more recently, the "Battle of Washington," are examples of the new transborder activist movements.

The development of civil society, in short, presents opportunities for democracy both vertically and horizontally. It is the route to a more humane, more participatory, more equitable future.

Pitfalls There are, of course, major obstacles that need to be surmounted if this vision is to become a reality.

First of all, there is the North-South divide among NGOs. Many Northern NGOs are, oftentimes, focused on single issues, such as the environment or human rights and carry agenda that are filtered through the lens of these particular issues. Southern NGOs, on the other hand, are more comprehensive in their concerns. They are concerned almost equally with the environment, social equity, development, national sovereignty, and democracy. Thus, while NGOs in the North working on climate change are sometimes solely concerned about bringing down the level of greenhouse gas emissions, Southern NGOs want to make sure that bringing down CO2 levels in the South does not conflict with the legitimate aspirations to development of their countries. Similarly, they are concerned that environmental standards in the North do not become a protectionist screen against the entry of products from the Third World.

Second, there is the question of compromising with or fundamentally opposing corporate-led globalization. For some CSOs, both in the North and the South, corporate-led globalization is inevitable; the main task is to humanize it. For instance, some labor and environmental NGOs see the World Trade Organization as a fact of life and focus their energies on attaching "social" or "environmental" clauses to WTO agreements. Others see the WTO as fundamentally problematic and push for abolishing or radically reducing its powers.

Third, there is the question of working with governments. Some CSOs adopt a stand of maximizing cooperation with governments so as to get governments to adopt some of their agenda. Many environmental NGOs in the North, for instance, worked with the US government to ban imports of tuna and shrimps to the US if these were not caught with methods specified in US government legislation. In the South, some NGOs have strongly supported the nationalist policies of certain governments, while muting their criticisms of other aspects of their governments, like the bad record of these governments in the area of human rights and democracy. Other NGOs in both the North and the South, in contrast, have made it a point to limit working relationships with governments to a minimum, while maximizing their critical stance.

A fourth problem is that competition and intrigues among CSOs are often just as intense and destructive as conflicts in the political and business worlds. Among NGOs in the North and the South, a source of intense competition that can quickly make allies into adversaries is funding. Indeed, some observers contend that nothing has proven more problematic in terms of building common fronts and common programs among CSOs and NGOs than fights over funds which often mask as fights over principles or politics.

In any event, pluralism will continue to mark global civil society. This is its source of strength. But it can also be a source of fatal weakness, one which will prevent the emergence of a working unity of CSOs, whether at the national or global level. The challenge is how to ensure that differences in strategies and tactics do not become the sources of permanent and bitter divisions. The challenge is how to keep dialogue going so that differences on some issues do not prevent coming together in solidarity on other issues. To take a very current issue, can CSOs that found themselves on different sides of the battle on the question of the US's granting of permanent normal trade relations to China work together to radically reduce the powers of the WTO.

Corporations, governments, and multilateral organizations that carry the pro-corporate globalization project are waiting to seize on divisions among CSOs and NGOs. It is important to make sure that even as CSOs disagree among themselves, they do not play into the hands of forces with a different agenda.

Paving the way to a new world: let us globalise the struggle!

Final resolution from the Geneva 2000 Alternative Summit

We, representatives of civil society, from different backgrounds and 60 countries, meeting in Geneva for an Alternative Summit on June 22nd to 25th in response to the Bangkok Appeal and on the eve of the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on social development, fully recognize the challenges facing our peoples as they endeavor to achieve social development in the context of globalization.

We have adopted the following declaration, which we invite all social movements, trade unions, NGOs, groups and associations who are engaged in the struggle against neo-liberal, sexist globalization to sign. In this way, we aim to globalize our struggle and together pave the way to a New World.

1. Globalization in a State of Crisis The new millennium heralds increasing inequality between the countries of the North and the South, between those of the East and the West and, within the same country, between the rich and the poor, between women and men, between the young and the old, between urban and rural areas.

More and more people are suffering from poverty, including in the most affluent societies, while humanity produces considerable amounts of wealth. Neo-liberal globalization accentuates these inequalities. Everyone is affected, but women and children pay the highest price, as neo-liberal politics have intensified the feminization of poverty, propelled women and children into the global sex industry and exacerbated pre-existing violence against women. Globalization is thus not only neo-liberal, but sexist too.

Globalization is also characterized by its policy of immediate returns, exhausting the planet's resources. By promoting the domination of finance over all aspects of life, it undermines democracies, nation states, mechanisms for social solidarity and public services. Moreover, it favors the free circulation of goods but prevents the free movement of people, resulting in an explosion of migration: immigrants suffering from exclusion, exploitation, xenophobia and racism. Finally, it violates the most basic human rights (civil, political, economic and cultural), turning the neo-liberal model into a real crime against humanity.

In response to mounting opposition from increasing numbers of people and the manifest failure of neo-liberal policies, the establishment has adopted the language of "globalization with a human face". On the one hand, it has co-opted the social agenda and is attempting to engage civil society in this process by offering it pseudo-influence through, for example, the World Bank / IMF Poverty Reduction and Growth Papers (PRSP). On the other hand, it is attempting to divide and increasingly represses critical social movements, trade unions and NGOs in order to weaken them.

Neo-liberal globalization also leads to many armed conflicts that continue to decimate civil populations and drain national budgets, to the advantage of the arms industry. The growing role of the "powers", reminiscent of imperialist traditions and enabled by the regrouping of their armies under NATO control, is disintegrating and disintegrating local culture and solidarity and results in rivalry between ethnic groups and the disintegration of society. This leads to the risk of wars, sometimes waged in the name of peace, and to the rise of sectarian attitudes that can take the form of fundamentalism or extreme nationalism. For example, with the pretext of fighting against drug trafficking, the United States' government increasingly represses insurrection movements and, particularly in the Andean region of Latin America, represses social movements through the installation of a powerful military base in Ecuador. Alongside the approval of Plan Colombia, exacerbates armed conflict in the country and could lead it to spread throughout the region. Another example is the way in which the same US foreign policy can lead to the "instrumentalization" of fundamentalist groups, as is the case in Afghanistan, where the Taliban dictatorship makes its living from opium production.

There is no single answer to these crises but the fact that these conflicts exist makes it all the more urgent to develop solidarity between peoples in order to help bring about or reinforce popular structures, in particular trade unions or associations, allowing a chance for struggle and emancipation which consists of neither falling back on reactionary solutions nor accepting the dictates of Western governments.

We want to build a better world, based on human rights to total development, where men and women

will live in equality, where there will be no discrimination or exclusion, and where peoples and their knowledge will be respected.

We underline the importance of respecting fundamental human rights and, in particular, of implementing economic, social and cultural rights; the importance of using regional and international human rights instruments as a basis for criticizing the dominant neo-liberal model; and the importance of encouraging Nation States to fulfill their obligations regarding human rights.

2. Networks for Action Social struggles have taken on an international dimension over the last few years with the aim of demanding a equitable and responsible distribution of wealth. In 1996 the Zapatistas began this initiative, organizing the First Intercontinental Gathering for Humanity and against Neo-liberalism, which united struggles from around the globe and called on the people of the world to create a network of resistance movements. This both laid the foundation and set the standard for many of today's movements against globalization. It is not surprising that the Mexican government and the world powers seek to destroy the Zapatista Communities in order to eliminate the starting point of this resistance against them. Then followed mobilization at an international level or around campaigns on specific themes such as the World March of Women, successfully denouncing poverty and violence against women; initiatives following the setting up of the WTO, particularly the creation of the Peoples' Global Action against "Free" Trade and the WTO (PGA); as well as many other movements too numerous to mention here. These movements often focus on social and environmental rights, as is the case with the Latin American campaign organized every October 12th on the Day of the Excluded, "El Grito de Los Excluidos".

The success of the recent demonstrations in the United States follows the emergence, during the past few years, of a series of mass campaigns with worldwide impact. These include the campaign for the cancellation of the debt of impoverished countries spearheaded, in particular, by collectives under the banner of "Jubilee 2000"; the campaign against the MAI; the campaign for the control and taxation of capital led by ATTAC, amongst others; the campaign against the WTO or against the increased power and scope of the WTO; as well as the campaign against IMF/World Bank structural adjustment and other economic reform programs.

The very scale of these movements bears witness to the emergence of a totally new situation. Their responsibility has grown because their actions have attracted worldwide media coverage and raised the expectations of not only militant networks but also large proportions of public opinion throughout the world.

3. Charting the Ways to our New World These campaigns reveal the increasing rejection of the effects of a neo-liberal globalization that serves the interests of dominant states, the financial sector and multinational corporations.

- Social questions are at the heart of this rejection. Neo-liberalism has contributed to reducing the role of the State, weakening public services (for example, by privatization policies that threaten the health, education and social security sectors), eroding social rights and weakening trade union powers. The way in which neo-liberal globalization has developed since the start of the 1990s has further accelerated this process and seriously increased insecurity of employment and instability in living and working conditions.

- Gender is also a major issue, as can be seen in the growing feminization of poverty and in persistent violence against women. Establishing the equality of men and women as fact remains at the heart of the struggle against neo-liberal globalization. The increasing campaigning by women around the world is a sure sign of this.

- Environmental questions, in the broadest sense, are also at the heart of recent campaigns - such as the refusal to allow the patenting of life by multinationals, who have succeeded in patenting various plants and life forms in recent years; massive rejection of genetically modified organisms (GMOs); as well as the struggle against article 27.3(b) of the TRIPS Agreement, which menaces the very existence of indigenous communities and their traditional knowledge.

- Democracy is the fourth issue of this global campaign. The will of citizens to take matters in their own hands, to have a say in the future of our world, is being expressed increasingly and massively in the face of political and financial institutions that make decisions without any real control by the population, and especially in the face of the ideological "brainwashing" that tries to tell us there is no alternative to current neo-liberal policies.

- Finally, the struggle against xenophobia and racism and in favor of social integration and equality for immigrants is also an important issue in this worldwide resistance to neo-liberal globalization.

In this context, social movements, trade unions and NGOs must at the same time: - construct and develop the widest possible movements around practical goals. As we have already seen with the MAI or the Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Seattle, and the April 2000 meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington, D.C., this is a vital way of modifying the balance of power and of counterattacking the proponents of neo-liberal globalization. These practical campaigns also allow the building and testing of alliances between the various movements, both nationally and internationally; - debate the alternatives to the neo-liberal model as well as questions that might create divisions between movements; - make progress in the coordination of movements on an international level.

4. Debate and Develop Alternatives The discussions that took place in Seattle among trade unions, NGOs and social movements showed that different approaches exist, particularly to social or environmental standards. The best way forward is to build a power base and declare new rights. Various international campaigns were also the subject of debate and discussion, especially the issues of debt (the concept of poorest countries, or how to control the use of the funds released by debt cancellation) or international financial institutions (their reform or abolition).

However, these different approaches have not been - and are not - an obstacle to joint action. The shared refusal of neo-liberal globalization and the general support within the movement for development centered on human beings, a source for inspiration rich in its diversity, mean that the points of convergence between the various movements create a sufficiently solid base. This synergy makes it possible to move beyond any points of divergence on the possible strategies for human development and to create alternative proposals.

5. Solidarity through Action There are now multiple initiatives, actions, campaigns and movements around the world that bear witness to the fact that another kind of world is possible - now. Many are based on highly practical goals. Let us mention: DEBT We appeal to all social movements, North and South, to fight for: - cancellation of all the debt of developing countries which is illegitimate, immoral and unpayable; - to phase out the so-called Heavily Indebted Poorest Countries' Initiative (HIPC) which is a parody of debt cancellation; - to end the IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programs in indebted nations. We call for a definitive solution to debt crisis, a solution that is fair, transparent and accountable to the people. We also call for a mass global mobilization in the countdown to the G8 Summit in Okinawa from July 21st to 23rd and for the UN Millennium Summit in New York on September 6th to address itself to canceling debt in this millennium year.

THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND (IMF) AND THE WORLD BANK

This Alternative Summit demands radical changes to the IMF and World Bank. For this reason we are calling for:

1. Total cancellation of multilateral debt (owed to the IMF and the World Bank in particular), with no structural adjustment or other externally imposed conditions, including on how the released funds are spent.
2. An end to structural adjustment programs and all other economic reform programs, designed and imposed from the outside by the IMF and the World Bank, as they are undemocratic and have disastrous social and economic consequences for local populations.
3. Transparency and democratization of the IMF and World Bank, that must be directly accountable to the people still affected by their policies and projects. The future existence, structure and policies of these international institutions must be determined through a democratic, transparent process.
4. Respect, by these international institutions, of human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international law and to have the rights as a framework for their projects and policies; and to at all times respect national obligations to international and regional human rights instruments.
5. Reduction of World Bank powers and accountability for this institution, as proposed by the international World Bank Bonds Campaign.
6. If these institutions continue to work within their framework of global liberalization, the movement for an Alternative World will not hesitate to force the abolition of the IMF and the World Bank. Therefore, we call for a worldwide week of action, centered around September 26th to coincide with the annual meeting in Prague, Czech Republic, of the IMF and World Bank, as a time to demand

radical changes of the World Bank and the IMF and a new structure for the international financial system.

THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION The world is not a commodity and humanity is not a resource. The time has come to recognize that international trade and its leading institution, the WTO, born out of the Marrakech Agreement, are in a state of crisis. It is time to replace this outdated, iniquitous, oppressive system by a framework for fair and durable trade for the 21st Century.

We continue to oppose any further negotiation rounds and to demand a moratorium on any new negotiations that would increase the power and scope of the WTO, and the exclusion from WTO jurisdiction of such issues as rural agriculture, social services and intellectual property rights. We demand the imposition of controls and taxes on capital. Access to basic requirements must be guaranteed: sectors such as health, education, culture, housing, the environment, the provision of water and other essential requirements are fundamental rights. These sectors cannot be subjected to the rules of international commerce and must therefore be excluded from the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). In the same way, policies that aim to promote and protect food safety and self-sufficiency and sustainable rural agriculture should never be subjected to multilateral trade laws.

The Dispute Settlement Body operates in secrecy, usurping the legislative and regulatory powers of sovereign states and communities. Therefore, it should cease to exist. International trade rules should be subjected to international law as defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESOCUL); and the various international conventions, covenants and protocols which guarantee first and foremost peoples' fundamental human and sovereign rights.

The Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) encourages the creation of monopolies that profit multinational corporations. It denies the right to healthcare and medicines for the majority. It results in knowledge and living matter being privatized, biodiversity being compromised and countries of the global South being prevented from improving their levels of social and economic welfare or developing their technical know-how. TRIPS has no place within the WTO. We condemn the policies implemented by the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD. We denounce the way in which national and regional political powers (including the European Union) bear allegiance to transnational interest groups: the World Economic Forum; the International Chamber of Commerce; the European Roundtable; Services 2000; organizations which believe that they can regulate immigration according to their requirements in cheap labor.

We, the undersigned movements and organizations, commit ourselves to working towards a fair, democratically controlled system of international trade. We will support struggles on every scale, in all countries, through international campaigns of solidarity.

CONTROLLING CAPITAL FLOW AND TAX HAVENS The Tobin Tax The Tobin Tax applies to currency exchange transactions only. It is not the sole solution to the many problems and claims raised by financial globalization. It is one widely supported way to control worldwide capital flows.

Due to its simplicity, the way it is structured and its impact, it can achieve a variety of synergistic goals. It is educational and dynamic, allowing citizens to understand why social, economic and political problems are linked to neo-liberal globalization. As a tool to fight financial speculation it allows, if set at a sufficiently high level, the slowing-down of speculation that destabilizes economies and holds back all national projects aiming at construction and progress. Due to the significant revenues it generates, as a tool for international politics it allows a different international structure to be implemented, based on the global redistribution and sharing of wealth.

The Tobin Tax is a practical, feasible proposal. The electronic systems commonly used by banks would allow it to be implemented very easily. It depends above all on political will.

The way in which the revenue from this tax should be distributed is under discussion. One proposal is to create a new democratic international institution, mindful of social and environmental concerns,

which would be responsible for managing the resources generated by the tax.

This is part of a wider issue: the struggle against unemployment and exclusion. The deregulation of labor markets goes hand in hand with employment policies that, in the name of the fight against unemployment, aggravate employment insecurity and low pay. It also goes hand in hand with policies that aim to dismantle the social welfare state. The best way to change governments' opinions is through the weight of citizens' action. Initially, this could be organized at the European level. We should therefore prepare to join together in a campaign against unemployment and job insecurity during the European Union Summit in Nice next December. This will also be an opportunity to campaign for social rights and the Tobin Tax.

Tax Havens It is impossible to consider taxation without considering tax havens, where the assets of financial crime are recycled. They must be dismantled. Tax havens are like a noose around the world's throat. They are joint ventures linking together three partners: multinationals (tax fraud; huge commissions on world markets; oil, arms, transportation, etc.), money-laundering organizations and Nation-States (financing political parties and politicians). It is therefore clear that governments and Nation-States are responsible. However, they have no real desire to dismantle tax havens even if a number of their members are fighting them. The major tax havens are not offshore but in London, Geneva, Liechtenstein, Monaco, etc.

Our objective is to crush these tax havens through targeted information and pressure campaigns, such as a march to one of the tax havens, to a multinational company's headquarters or to several of these targets simultaneously. It has also been suggested that the impact of tax havens on small countries should be studied and economic alternatives financed by the G7 nations once these countries' tax havens have been wiped out.

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS These agreements are presented as being necessary. They favor multinational corporations and local elites but cannot satisfy the needs of the people; on the contrary, they lead to increased poverty and exclusion. Bilateral, regional and international agreements exclude the social and environmental agenda and ignore the imbalances between countries: all they do is favor cross-border capital flows and local elites, preventing the application of democracy.

On the basis of these negative experiences, we reject the project to create the FTAA (Free Trade Area of America) proposed by the United States government in conjunction with the other governments in the region, and also reject similar agreements in Africa, Asia or elsewhere.

We call for fair, equitable trade agreements that form part of a scheme for durable development, negotiated with the populations concerned and agreed by them, and aimed at peoples' social development.

THE WORLD MARCH OF WOMEN, 2000 With more than 4,500 groups in 155 countries, the World March of Women 2000 is an unprecedented movement of women campaigning against poverty and in favor of sharing wealth. It aims to fight violence against women and sexual inequality. It is part of the body of social movements, trade unions, groups, associations, NGOs, etc. who are fighting the current trend of neo-liberal globalization, suggesting alternatives and weaving a web of solidarity around the planet.

The March believes that globalization today is not just a capitalist and neo-liberal phenomenon but also sexist. The situation imposed on women can only be explained by the combined effect of two global forces: neo-liberal capitalism and a patriarchy? which feed on one another and reinforce each other to maintain the vast majority of women in a state of cultural inferiority and social deprecation, on the fringes of the economy, where their work and very existence is "invisible" and their bodies treated like a commodity. All of this amounts to "gender apartheid".

Unfortunately, Beijing+5 has demonstrated that a lot of ground still needs to be covered before fundamental women's rights are respected. The March seeks to build a world where women and men are equal, where women are freed from all forms of violence and exploitation including domestic violence, rape, prostitution, trafficking of women, sexual harassment and social and State violence. The March wants to fight the structural causes of poverty and violence against women and many of their claims are similar to those of other social movements, but with an additional gender perspective: - All Nation States should set up a legal framework and strategies for eliminating poverty, in particular female poverty. - Urgent measures such as those described in this Resolution should be implemented. - A Council for Economic and Financial Security should be set up to exercise political control over financial markets and to define worldwide rules for a new financial system. It should include representatives of civil society and ensure both male-female and North-South parity. - Conventions and measures designed to eliminate all violence against women should be applied. Particular attention should be paid to taking into account lesbian claims, because globalization is not only sexist but also particularly uncompromising with homosexuals.

The March demands that the principle of sexual equality be applied immediately in all committees or organizations which the movement for an Alternative World sets up, and that significant space be given within these structures to representatives of Southern Hemisphere countries and minority groups.

The March invites all movements to join them in its coming campaigns: - October 14th, 2000: Brussels, European demonstration; - October 15th, 2000: Washington, D.C., demonstration against the World Bank and the IMF; - October 17th, 2000: New York City, in front of the United Nations building, where an international March delegation will meet Kofi Annan to explain women's claims and inform him of the March's determination to have them met.

6. Coordinating International Action and Campaigns The impact of the international campaigns and demonstrations in Seattle and Washington, D.C. was largely due to the way they were carried out: a network of flexible, independent groups came together to campaign on mutually agreed and practical issues. This is what allowed very diverse movements to join together in common action. At the same time, it is important to compare notes and create a forum for debate, to enrich these movements with the cumulative experience of our fight against neo-liberal globalization. To do this, we must build a very flexible international alliance based on the practical campaigns these movements organize.

This has already begun, building on the will to formulate a common agenda, on getting to know each other, on understanding the stakes involved in each other's actions, and on a practical need to share information between regions, campaigns and movements so as to increase their visibility and efficiency.

Setting up coordination on an international level will be a complex process. The approach we use should make our movement both broader and deeper, in a conscious effort to bring together trade unions, workers' organizations, women, rural workers, cultural organizations, etc. The coordinating structure must also be strongly rooted in the social concerns and struggles of the peoples and populations concerned.

There are several ways of moving this process forward: linking thematic and regional campaigns, common days of action, peoples' assemblies, making more efficient use of technology, coordination secretariats, etc.

Among coming events, this December's Dakar 2000 Summit in Senegal and the January 2001 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, are two important opportunities to pursue this discussion process - with the aim of creating an international network for action.

For more information: <http://attac.org/geneve2000/>

Focus-on-Trade is a regular electronic bulletin providing updates and analysis of trends in regional and world trade and finance, with an emphasis on analysis of these trends from an integrative, interdisciplinary viewpoint that is sensitive not only to economic issues, but also to ecological, political, gender and social issues. Your contributions and comments are welcome.

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