

Humanity's right to life

Climate change is already causing enormous damage and hundreds of millions of poor people are enduring the consequences.

The most advanced research centers have claimed that there is little time to avoid an irreversible catastrophe. James Hansen, from the NASA Goddard Institute, has said that a proportion of 350 parts of carbon dioxide by million is still tolerable; however, the figure today is 390 and growing at a pace of 2 parts by million every year exceeding the levels of 600 thousand years ago. Each one of the past two decades has been the warmest since the first records were taken while carbon dioxide increased 80 parts by million in the past 150 years.

The meltdown of ice in the Artic Sea and of the huge two-kilometer thick icecap covering Greenland; of the South American glaciers feeding its main fresh water sources and the enormous volume covering the Antarctic; of the remaining icecap on the Kilimanjaro, the ice on the Himalayan and the large frozen area of Siberia are visible. Outstanding scientists fear abrupt quantitative changes in these natural phenomena that bring about the change.

Humanity entertained high hopes in the Copenhagen Summit after the Kyoto Protocol signed in 1997 entered into force in 2005. The resounding failure of the Summit gave rise to shameful episodes that call for due clarification.

The United States, with less than 5% of the world population releases 25% of the carbon dioxide. The new US President had promised to cooperate with the international effort to tackle a new problem that afflicts that country as much as the rest of the world. In the meetings leading to the Summit, it became clear that the leaders of that nation and of the wealthiest countries were maneuvering to place the burden of sacrifices on the emergent and poor countries.

A great number of leaders and thousands of representatives of social movements and scientific institutions, determined to fight for the preservation of humanity from the greatest risk in history, converged in Copenhagen on the invitation of the organizers of the Summit. I'd rather avoid reference to details of the brutality of the Danish police force against thousands of protesters and invitees from social and scientific movements who traveled to the Danish capital. I'll focus on the political features of the Summit.

Actually, chaos prevailed in Copenhagen where incredible things happened. The social movements and scientific institutions were not allowed to attend the debates. There were heads of State and Government who could not even express their views on crucial issues. Obama and the leaders of the wealthiest nations took over the conference, with the complicity of the Danish government. The United Nations agencies were pushed to the background.

Barack Obama, the last to arrive on the day of the Summit for a 12-hours stay, met with two groups of invitees carefully chosen by him and his staff, and in the company of one of them met at the plenary hall with the rest of the high-level delegations. He made his remarks and left right away through the back door. Except for the small group chosen by him, the other representatives of countries were prevented from taking the floor during that plenary session. The presidents of Bolivia and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela were allowed to speak because the Chairman of the Summit had no choice but to give them the floor in light of the strong pressures of those present.

In an adjacent room, Obama brought together the leaders of the wealthiest nations, some of the most

important emerging States and two very poor countries. He then introduced a document, negotiated with two or three of the most important countries, ignored the UN General Assembly, gave a press conference and left like Julius Caesar after one of his victorious wars in Asia Minor that led him to say: "I came, I saw, I conquered."

Even Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, had said on October 19: "If we do not reach a deal over the next few months, let us be in no doubt, since once the damage from unchecked emissions growth is done, no retrospective global agreement in some future period can undo that choice. By then it will be irretrievably too late..."

Brown concluded his speech with these dramatic words: "We cannot afford to fail. If we fail now we will pay a heavy price. If we act now, if we act together, if we act with vision and resolve, success at Copenhagen is still within our reach, but, if we falter, the Earth will itself be at risk and, for the planet, there is no Plan B."

But later he arrogantly said that the United Nations could not be taken hostage by a group of countries like Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Tuvalu. At the same time, he accused China, India, Brazil, South Africa and other emerging countries of being lured by the United States into signing a document that throws the Kyoto Protocol in the wastebasket without a binding agreement involving the United States and its wealthy allies.

I find it necessary to recall that the United Nations Organization was born hardly six decades ago, after the last World War, when there were no more than fifty independent countries. Today, after the hateful colonial system ceased to exist thanks to the resolute struggle of the peoples, it has a membership of over 190 independent nations. For many years, even the People's Republic of China was denied admission to the UN while a puppet regime was its representative in that institution and in the privileged Security Council.

The tenacious support of the growing number of Third World nations would prove indispensable to China's international recognition and become an extremely significant element for the acceptance of that country's rights at the UN by the United States and its NATO allies.

It was the Soviet Union that made the greatest contribution to the heroic fight against fascism. More than 25 million of its people perished while the country was terribly devastated. It was from that struggle that it emerged as a superpower with the capacity to partly balance the absolute domination of the US imperial system and the former colonial powers to plunder the Third World countries unrestrictedly. Following the demise of the USSR, the United States extended its political and military power to the East, --up to Russia's heart-- and enhanced its influence on the rest of Europe. Therefore, what happened in Copenhagen came as no surprise.

I want to insist on how unfair and outrageous were the remarks of the Prime Minister of the UK and the Yankee attempt to impose as the Summit Accord a document that was at no time discussed with the attending countries.

During his press conference of December 21, Cuba's Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez made a statement that cannot be disproved. I will quote from some of its paragraphs: "I would like to emphasize that no agreement of the Conference of the Parties was reached in Copenhagen, that no decision was made as to binding or nonbinding commitments or pertaining to International Law; that simply did not happen. There was no agreement in Copenhagen."

"The Summit was a failure and a deception for the world [...] the lack of political will was left in the open..."

"...it was a step backward in the actions of the international community to prevent or mitigate the effects of climate change..."

"...the average world temperature could rise by 5 degrees..."

Right then our Foreign Minister adds other interesting data on the likely consequences of climate change according to the latest scientific research.

"...from the Kyoto Protocol until today the developed countries' emissions rose by 12.8%... and 55% of that volume corresponds to the United States."

"The average annual oil consumption is 25 barrels for an American, 11 barrels for a European, less than 2 barrels for a Chinese and less than 1 barrel for a Latin American or Caribbean citizen."

"Thirty countries, including those of the European Union, are consuming 80% of the fuel produced."

The fact is that the developed countries signatories of the Kyoto Protocol increased their emissions dramatically. Now, they want to replace the adopted bases of the emissions from 1990 with those of 2005. This means that the United States, which is the main source of emissions, would be reducing its emissions of 25 years ago in only 3%. It is a shameful mockery of the world public opinion.

The Cuban foreign minister, speaking on behalf of a group of ALBA member countries, defended China, India, Brazil, South Africa and other important emerging-economies states. He stressed the concept adopted in Kyoto that "common but differentiated responsibilities mean that the responsibility of the historical accumulators and the developed countries, who are the culprits of this catastrophe, differs from that of the small island states and the South countries, above all the least developed..."

"Responsibility means financing; responsibility means technology transfer on adequate terms. But, at this point, Obama resorts to a game of words and instead of talking of common but differentiated responsibilities, he speaks of 'common but differentiated responses.'"

"...he then leaves the plenary hall without taking the trouble of listening to anybody; he had neither listened to anybody before taking the floor."

In a subsequent press conference, before departing from the Danish capital, Obama had said: "There has been a meaningful and unprecedented breakthrough here in Copenhagen. For the first time in history, the largest economies have come to jointly accept responsibilities."

In his clear and irrefutable presentation, our Foreign Minister said: "What does it mean that 'the largest economies have come to jointly accept responsibilities'? It means that they are placing a large part of the burden of financing the relief and adaptation of countries, mostly the South countries, to climate change on China, Brazil, India and South Africa. Because it must be said that in Copenhagen we witnessed an assault, a holdup against China, Brazil, India and South Africa, and against every other euphemistically called developing country."

These were the resounding and undeniable words used by our Foreign Minister to describe what happened in Copenhagen.

I must add that, when at 10:00 a.m. on December 19 our Vicepresident Esteban Lazo and the Cuban Foreign Minister had already left, a belated attempt was made to resurrect the Copenhagen cadaver as a Summit Accord. At that moment, practically every head of State had left and there was hardly any minister around. Again, the denunciation by the remaining members of the delegations from Cuba, Venezuela, Bolivia, Nicaragua and other countries could defeat the maneuver. That was the end of the inglorious Summit.

Another fact that should not be overlooked is that at the most critical moment of that day, in the wee small hours, the Cuban Foreign Minister, together with the delegations waging the honorable battle,

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offered UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon their cooperation in the ever harder struggle being fought as well as in future efforts necessary to preserve the life of our species.

The environmental group Wild World Fund has warned that if emissions are not drastically reduced climate change will go unchecked in the next 5 to 10 years.

But there is no need to prove the substance of what is said here that Obama did.

The US President stated on Wednesday, December 23, that people are justified in being disappointed about the outcome of the Summit on Climate Change. In an interview with the CBS television network, the President said that "instead of a total collapse if nothing had been done, which would have been a huge step backward; at least we could remain more or less where we were..."

According to the press dispatch, Obama is the target of most criticism from the countries that nearly unanimously feel that the result of the Summit was disastrous.

Now, the UN is in a quandary since many countries would find it humiliating to ask others to adhere to the arrogant and antidemocratic accord.

To carry on with the battle and to claim in every meeting, particularly in those of Bonn and Mexico, humanity's right to life, with the morale and the strength that truth provides, is in my opinion the only way to proceed.

Fidel Castro Ruz
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