

Reclaim Our UN

Appeal of the International Seminar on the future of the UN and the International Institutions in preparation of the 5th World Social Forum 2005 in Porto Alegre

Padua, Italy, 19-20 November 2004

This is the time to build a wide world movement supporting the UN, its democratization and a new, just, peaceful and democratic international order.

1. Unilateralism is bad for the world. Multilateralism is not an option, it is indispensable. The alternative is world chaos, wars, terrorism, growing poverty, greater insecurity, injustice, environmental devastation.
2. The UN remains the highest form of multilateralism available today. It is full of limitations, has been hijacked by powerful governments, but it is the only one we have.
3. Most of the huge challenges facing humankind are global and to address them we need a global solution. The UN, with representatives from 191 countries, is the only worldwide forum that can and has to be the instrument for the people to achieve a world of peace and social justice, the goals of its charter.
4. The weakening of the UN, the failure of governments to fulfill their commitments to the decisions taken at the UN is part of a broader attack on a world order based on international law. It extends to international institutions the strategy of neoliberal globalisation, based on economic power, deregulation and privatisation, against peoples' rights and needs.
5. In the last ten years the emerging global civil society has become a new actor. Millions of people and thousands of organisations have become active against war, neoliberal globalisation and unilateralism, for a more democratic and just world order. They continue to challenge the actions and power of international institutions, developing alternatives from below on peace, security, human rights, combating impunity, economic and social justice, environmental sustainability.
6. As the UN system turns sixty, these mobilisations have filled the void left by the inaction of governments and showed the path for a radical reform that would make the UN system more democratic and effective.
7. Today these mobilisations have to be drawn together and developed on a broader scale with a more focused and effective strategy, built on the broadest participation, bringing together a diversity of perspectives and experiences, and creating a new consensus. The key players in this

process have to be, first of all, the peoples who are excluded from global decision making, social and grassroots movements, civil society organisations and NGOs, national and international networks, trade unions, religious groups, migrants and refugees groups, local authorities.

8. Many long years of inconclusive studies, reports and debates of the inter-governmental system have gone without reaching any conclusion. In order to start a positive reform process, it is now clear that there is a need for a global mobilisation of all sectors of civil society, from women to environmentalists, from indigenous people to human rights activists.

9. The fundamental objectives of such a strategy of mobilisation can be summarised as follows:

- oppose the strategy of «preventive and infinite» war, and unilateralism;
- reclaim and revitalise the UN system on the base of international law and human rights, putting it at the centre of a multilateral order;
- democratise the UN system, opening its doors to local authorities, local governments, other decentralised governments, parliaments, civil society voices representing the plurality of social, ethnic, gender and other diversities;
- ensure that the UN has the resources for implementing its mandate: prevent war, eradicate the causes of war (economic, social and cultural), promoting human rights, the global rule of law and international justice, and recover control over economic, social and environmental issues, subordinating the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO to the principles and agreements under the UN and its agencies;
- promote general disarmament and the ban of all nuclear arms and of all weapons of mass destruction;
- prevent conflicts, protect civilians, and react to humanitarian catastrophes.

10. New strengths and opportunities are available for this strategy of mobilisation. The success of the global days of action such as February 15, 2003 and March 20, 2004 against the war in Iraq has shown the new strength and awareness of global civil society. The greater concern of many governments in defence of multilateralism offers opportunities for exerting pressure.

11. This strategy of mobilisation should be developed at a variety of levels. There is no opposition between actions at the local level, national struggles for policy change and initiatives on international institutions. All civil society working at local, national or regional level needs a change in the international system of governance. A more democratic functioning of international institutions would open up spaces for change at the national and local level. Implementing the

principle of subsidiarity would restore decision making power for national and local democratic processes. Building new solidarities would strengthen the search for alternatives in countries of the South.

12. This strategy of mobilisation should develop from the bottom up with a process of education and communication within civil society and social movements. It should use the available means for changing national policies. It should use all available spaces within international institutions to demand and practice a more democratic and participatory functioning.

13. Civil society has to monitor closely the activities of the UN and international institutions. A global observatory on the international institutions could be studied and established with the object to evaluate periodically the commitment in practice of the UN activities to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

14. 2005 can be a turning point for such a mobilisation at the local and global level. We propose a global day of action for democracy, freedom and peace, against all fundamentalisms and wars, to be held on the eve of the Summit of Heads of State convened by the UN in New York in autumn 2005 for a review of the commitments undertaken at the Millennium Summit and the reform of UN.

15. Within the dynamics of the World Social Forum, the participants to the international Seminar «Reclaim Our UN» in Padua commit themselves to work together to continue the dialogue on these issues and facilitate the emergence of common mobilisations. At the WSF to be held in Porto Alegre in January 2005, within the activities of terrain 11, we will hold a seminar on the objectives of such mobilisations; another seminar where we will discuss the action plan for 2005; an open meeting on the future of the UN system bringing together social movements active on a variety of issues; we will ask all other terrains to take up the question of a more democratic world order, as a transversal issue, identifying possible specific strategies.

16. This effort does not start today. Civil society has developed in the last decade a variety of proposals and activities for reforming and democratising the UN system. They were never considered by governments and international institutions. Today many campaigns are demanding specific changes in international institutions; these could be linked into a global strategy of mobilisation.

17. The UN system has to be transformed in order to make it more democratic, representative and accountable. Any process of reform must include the active participation of key actors such as civil society organisations, local governments and parliaments.

18. The fundamental aim of such a strategy is to make human security the core mission of the UN system that should be reformed and restructured in order to fulfill this mission.

19. The concept of human security includes the economic social and legal dimensions, and the UN system should be reformed in order to extend its activities in these fields, regaining control over the rules and institutions regulating international finance, trade, social conditions, labour, the environment.

20. The creation of a Human Security and Development Council, with a transformation of ECOSOC, could be studied as a tool of governance of globalisation and control over IMF, World Bank and WTO, and on the operation of multinational corporations.

21. As the representative body, the UN General Assembly should be brought back at the centre of the UN, strengthened and democratized.

22. The present structure of the UN Security Council is unacceptable. Its composition, activity and the unlimited veto power contradicts the very concepts of democracy and human security.

23. The reform of the UN should include a renewed financial architecture reducing the dependence on decisions by powerful states, and a move towards a decentralisation of its locations and functions.

24. For too long the UN has been the exclusive domain of unaccountable governments. It needs to open up to democratic processes involving new actors representing the peoples. The status of civil society should be improved and its voice and role should be strengthened. All institutions and bodies within the UN system should be opened up to the involvement and participation of civil society, maintaining a bottom up approach.

25. The role of Local Authorities, that are closer to the needs of people, should be recognised and empowered.

26. Possible tools for recovering a democratic control over the activities of the UN system are the development of a representative Parliamentary presence in the governance of the UN system.

27. An important experience of involvement of civil society in the development of the UN system has been the creation of the International Criminal Court, the adoption of universal jurisdiction laws at the national level and other UN Human Right and Humanitarian organisations. Their power and mandate should be preserved and expanded.

Assembly of the Peoples' UN; Peace Roundtable (Italy); Ibase (Brazil); Inter Press Service; Ubuntu; Euralat; Cives (Brasil); Attac (Brazil); Conseu/CIEMEN - Centre Internacional Escarrè per a Minories ètniques i les Nacions; CADTM - Comité pour l'annulation de la Dette du Tiers Monde; IDEAS; Interdepartmental Centre on Human Rights and the Rights of Peoples of the University of Padua; UNESCO Chair on «Human Rights, Democracy and Peace» of the University of Padua; Campaign for the Reform of the World Bank; ACLI (Italy); Action for Economic Reforms (Philippines); Africa Peace Point (Kenya); Africa Trade Network; Agesci (Italy); AIC - Alternative Information Center (Israel/Palestine); Alianza por un Mundo Responsable y Solidario (Peru); Alliance pour un monde responsable, pluriel et solidaire / Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme (Brazil); ANND - Arab NGO Network for Development; ANONG - Cotidiano Mujer (Uruguay); ARCI (Italy); Articulacion Feminista MARCOSUR; Attac France; Bahrain Association for Human Rights (Bahrain); Beati i costruttori di pace (Italy); Bridge Initiative (France); BGRF - Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation (Bulgaria); CAFOR (Cameroon); CCFD - Comité Catholique contre la Faim et pour le Développement (France); Center Aziz Belal (Morocco); Centre Ubuntu (Burundi); Centro de Investigacion para la Paz (Spain); CGIL (Italy); Cipsi (Italy); CIDSE; CISL (Italy); Cities for Peace (United States); CNCA (Italy); Comunidad de autodeterminacion «Vida y Dignidad» of Cacarica-Chocò (Colombia); Comunidad de Paz San Jose de Apartadó (Colombia); CND - Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (GB); CONGO - Conference of NGOs in consultative relationship with the United Nations; CUT (Brazil); Dawn - Dev. Alternatives for Women; DION - Development Indian Ocean Network; Disabled Peoples' International - Europe; Djazairouna - des familles victimes du terrorisme (Algeria); Emmaus (Italy); FAL - Foro de Autoridades Locales de Porto Alegre; Fastenopfer (Switzerland); Focsiv (Italy); Focus on the Global South; Forum Mulher (Monzambique); Frida; General Board of Global Ministries - United Methodist Church (United States); Groupe Medialternatif (Haiti); Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy; Instituto de Estudios de CTA - Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (Argentina); Instituto Ethos (Brazil); IPB - International Peace Bureau; Le Mouvement de la Paix/French Peace Movement (France); Legambiente (Italy); Libera (Italy); Mani Tese (Italy); National Bureau of the Moroccan Federation of Trade Unions (Morocco); NGLS Unctad; Oxford Research Group (England); Pax Christi (Italy); Peace Boat Europe; Rodheci (Democratic Republic of Congo); Romania in the world cultural association (Romania); SID - Society for International Development; Social Watch; South Centre (Switzerland); The Socialist International; Transnational Institute; UFPJ - United For Peace and Justice (United States); Umoja As One (Kenya); University of Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic); UN Millennium Campaign; WCL - World Confederation of Labour; World Citizens Movement; World Federalist Movement.

() This document has been elaborated, thanks to the contribution of the co-ordinators of the working groups during the International Seminar «Reclaim Our UN» that took place on 19-20 November 2004 in Padua (Italy). The seminar saw the participation of over 600 people representing 25 International networks, 50 national organisations and 284 Italian associations. This is a working document and therefore it is useful for understanding the central elements of the discussion that took place in Padua and for continuing the discussion up to the World Social Forum, that will take place in Porto Alegre from 26 to 30 January. All the participants of the Padua seminar and those that were not able to come can contribute with comments and proposals. Please send them to: international@peacepoint.org. We will gather and circulate them. In Porto Alegre we will discuss them all and try to find a common platform.*