

Building Solidarities for Social, Economic and Environmental Justice:

Goa Declaration of the People's Forum on BRICS

Alto Porvorim, Goa, India

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The People's Forum met from 13-14 October 2016, ahead of the BRICS 2016 heads-of-state summit which was hosted in India at a time when humanity and the planet face severe, overlapping crises that were analysed in our Forum:

- **democracy is under threat**, as the illegitimate Brazilian 'President' Michel Temer's presence reminds us, along with attacks on democratic space in the other BRICS;
- **state repression is rising**, such as in India where movements' dissent is met with brutal repression, and in South Africa where university students have been brutally victimised by local police in recent days;
- **ecological destruction is** widespread, with catastrophic rates of species loss, pollution of land and air, freshwater and ocean degradation, and public health threats rising, to which no BRICS country is immune;
- **in particular, climate change** is already having disastrous effects –for example, in India and Southern Africa where large regions face extreme drought – with no relief expected from the Paris COP21 agreement in which negotiators regrettably agreed to non-binding commitments that benefit mainly the North and the BRICS corporations;
- the **world economy is teetering** on the brink of a financial meltdown, reflected in the chaos that several BRICS' stock and currency markets have been facing, as well as in our countries' vulnerability to crisis-contagion if major European banks soon fail in a manner similar to the US-catalysed meltdown in 2008-09;
- the longer-term crisis of capitalism is evident in the **marked slowdown in international trade** and in declining global profit rates, especially evident in the three BRICS countries (South Africa, Russia and Brazil) which have negative or negligible GDP growth;
- in addition to commodity crashes, one cause of the economic crisis is the **deregulatory, neoliberal philosophy adopted by BRICS governments**, which puts corporate property rights above human and environmental rights; in the guise of development
- in the **World Trade Organisation**, BRICS' contributions to negotiations were disastrous in the latest round, where food sovereignty was lost because India and Brazil joined the US and EU to reinforce liberalisation;

- the new generation of **Bilateral Trade and Investment Treaties** will potentially have adverse impacts on lives and livelihoods of people across the BRICS and their hinterlands, and need complete rethinking.
- the world's **workers are losing rights, farmers are suffering** to the point of suicide, and **labour casualisation** is rampant in all our countries, with the result that BRICS workers are engaged in regular protest, including the strike by 180 million Indian workers which inspired the world on 2 September 2016;
- on the social front, the **threat to our already-inadequate welfare policies** is serious, especially in Brazil's coup regime but also across the BRICS where inadequate social policies are driving people on the margins to destitution;
- the **commodification and privatisation of public services** is causing misery, such as in South Africa where university students are fighting hard for a fee-free, decolonised tertiary education;
- **patriarchy and sexual violence, racism, communalism, caste discrimination, xenophobia and homophobia** run rampant in all the BRICS, and because these forces serve our leaders' interests, they are not addressing the structural causes, perpetuating divide-and-rule politics, and failing to dissuade ordinary people from contributing to oppression;
- **unsustainable energy options such as nuclear power and large infrastructure projects** are being undemocratically pushed in BRICS countries. The spirited resistance from peoples movements is being met with brutal repression of those fighting against land appropriation, loss of livelihoods and environmental and health hazards
- the destructive **arms trade** is rampant in the BRICS, such as India's with Israel, or South Africa's notorious corrupting arms deal with Northern firms; and
- the whole world is concerned about **geopolitical tensions** in West Asia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti.

Everywhere that people's movements have made alternative demands – such as democracy, peace, poverty eradication, sustainable development, equality, fair trade, climate justice – the elites have co-opted our language and distorted our visions beyond recognition. Many of our leaders are hopelessly corrupt, and so while BRICS spin-doctors claim that their work in Goa will “build responsive, inclusive and collective solutions,” we have spent two days looking beyond the pleasing rhetoric and have found a very different, harsh reality.

While we criticise the way world power is created and exercised, the BRICS leaders appear to simply want power *sharing* and a seat at the high table. For example, the BRICS New Development Bank is working hand-in-glove with the World Bank; the Contingent Reserve Arrangement empowers the International Monetary Fund; and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank serves mainly corporate interests – and all these financial institutions, despite their rhetoric of transformation, are opaque and untransparent to people in BRICS countries, with no accountability mechanisms or space for meaningful participation by our movements

Whether or not these crises are resolved in coming decades, or degenerate into full-blown catastrophes, the BRICS governments and peoples will be central to most, if not all. The need for our popular movements to focus on how the BRICS as a bloc contribute to these global problems or could address these, and to combine our forces across borders, is the reason the People's Forum was convened.

Building on the work of prior meetings of progressive movements in Durban (2013) and Fortaleza (2014), the Goa BRICS People's Forum brought together more than 500 representatives of movements from numerous countries in two plenaries, 14 workshops and countless informal collaborations, apart from 8 workshops in the run up in the host State of Goa and in Delhi. We heard testimonies confirming that the BRICS countries and corporations are reinforcing the dominant neoliberal, extractivist paradigm. Negative trends in the areas of global and local politics, and on issues of economics, environment, development, peace, conflict and aggressive nationalism, or social prejudice based on gender, race, caste, sexual orientation are not being reversed by the BRICS, but instead are often exacerbated. The BRICS speak of offering strong alternatives to the unfair North-dominated regimes of trade, finance, investment and property rights, climate governance, and other multilateral regimes. But on examination, we find these claims unconvincing.

Consider the way the BRICS leaders bulldozed their way into Goa. The summit was thrust on our society, the environment was damaged during road-widening, fisherfolk were prevented from pursuing their livelihood during the summit and ordinary people who make a living along the roadside have been displaced – to give the visitors a false impression of our state. Tibetans who wanted to raise the status of Tibet with China were arrested and imprisoned.

We have raised constructive critiques of BRICS in our plenaries and workshops. But beyond the analysis, we understand that only people's power and activism, across borders, can make change. Some of our most successful struggles – such as access to life-savings medicines or ending apartheid – required and were strengthened by international solidarity. This Forum found many routes forward for cross-cutting BRICS internationalism on various issues.

We recognise the need for a just solution to the Syrian crisis in accordance with the principles of international law, and condemn the US-backed aggression and the Pentagon/NATO doctrine of regime change. We reaffirm our solidarity with the Palestinian struggle against colonialism and occupation, and we endorse Boycotts, Divestment and Sanctions against apartheid Israel, including opposition to Israel's attempted export of its unsustainable water and agricultural technologies to BRICS countries.

We intend to win our demands for social, economic and environmental justice. The victories we have won already on multiple fronts – such as halting numerous multinational corporations' exploitation, gaining access to essential state services, occupying land and creating agricultural cooperatives, and generating more humane values in our societies – give us momentum and optimism. In 2017 and beyond, the BRICS People's Forum will reconvene, and redouble our efforts with new-found allies and united transcontinental movements in solidarity and struggle from Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.