

TERRAVIVA

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CIVICUS World Assembly Kicks off...

JUST A SUMMER DAY



Morag Livingstone

On the first day of Summer, the CIVICUS World Assembly 2006 opened last night with a warm welcome from Scotland's First Minister Jack McConnell. He told over 1200 delegates from 100 different countries that he hoped the event would be a success and assist in supporting civil society organisations across the world.

"We are honoured to be the first country in Western Europe to host this assembly – and to have this opportunity to become a home the assembly for the coming three years," he said. "After CIVICUS

moves on, we hope to ensure something permanent remains in Scotland, to ensure this is an opportunity for Scotland to strengthen our contribution to civil society across the world."

Earlier, the co-chairs of the assembly's programme committee, Annabel Cruz and Martin Sime, welcomed delegates and said: "We express the hope that, over the next five days, you will share your experiences, your hopes and your dreams with your brothers and sisters in civil society... But above all, this is a meeting which demands your participation. We need all of our

voices to be heard so that we can act together for a just world."

The Conference Plenary is set to open this morning to set the agenda for the days ahead and will feature a Dream Weave and will be addressed by Mary Robinson, the President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, and Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General, CIVICUS, as well as Irungu Houghton the Pan Africa Policy Advisor from Oxfam, Kenya.

The opening plenary is being webcast around the world with the help of Humania TV and Oracle.

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Accountability Charter

Advocacy Groups Take Their Own Medicine

The leaders of 11 major international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) decided to practice what they preach to governments and business by endorsing an "Accountability Charter" for themselves.

The six-page charter commits its signatories to, among other things, comply with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ensure "good governance" and transparency, and maintain high ethical standards in their fund-raising and advocacy activities.

Besides Amnesty, other signers included ActionAid International, CIVICUS, Consumers International, Greenpeace International, Oxfam International, International Save the Children Alliance, Survival International Federation Terre des Hommes, Transparency International, and the World YWCA.

A series of global surveys stretching back several years has shown that international NGOs enjoy greater trust among the general public in western countries and elsewhere than do governments, business, the media, or other major social and political institutions.

At the same time, the influence and visibility of these groups have grown significantly, particularly in multilateral forums where, among other activities, they have pressed for the adoption of new international treaties and legal norms binding national governments to more rigorous standards on human rights, environmental protection, arms, and international justice, among other issues.

They have also campaigned for the adoption of binding codes of conduct for multinational corporations (MNCs) covering such issues as human rights, environmental protection, corruption, transpar-



The heads of 11 of the world's leading human rights, environmental and social development international organisations publicly endorsed the first global accountability charter for the non-profit sector

ency, and economic equity in their overseas operations.

Unchecked Sector

"NGOs use their growing influence inside international organizations to push for the establishment of globalized standards and international legal norms," the site www.ngowatch.org states. "Yet this growing local and global role has in large part been unchecked and unregulated."

To some extent, the new Charter can be seen as a response to this critique.

"NGOs are playing an increasingly prominent role in setting the agenda in today's globalised world," said Amnesty's secretary general, Irene Khan. "This places a clear responsibility on us to act with transparency and accountability."

"The Accountability Charter clearly shows that NGOs are will-

ing to adhere to a code of conduct, lead by example, and encourage others to follow," she added.

David Nussbaum, head of Transparency International, echoed that view, noting that "International NGOs have an essential role to play in global governance. This charter sets out specific ways in which we demonstrate that our accountability means in practice. Transparency International advocates for open disclosure of relevant information to maintain trust and credibility — for NGOs as well as for companies and governments."

Standards

The charter, which is voluntary, is designed for international NGOs in particular, and lays out basic principles to which all signatories subscribe, including basic freedoms of speech, assembly, and association,

non-discrimination, and the advancement of international and national laws that "promote human rights, ecosystem protection, sustainable development and other public goods".

It calls for signatories to adhere to financial accounting and reporting requirements in the countries where they are based and operate and to issue detailed annual reports on their mission, operations, funding, and compliance with the charter and to ensure that its governance structure is transparent and responsive to its membership and stakeholders.

It similarly advocates principles of "ethical fundraising", including the rights of donors to be informed how their donation is used and how it furthers the organisation's mission, and "professional management," including the use of best practices in financial management and defined evaluation procedures for boards, staff, programmes and projects.

It requires that any public criticism of individuals or organisations by signatory NGOs be "responsible" and be guided by principles of "fair public comment".

International Law

Signatories should conform to all international and national labour regulations, and compensation for staff "should strike a balance between public expectations of voluntary-based, not-for-profit organisations and the need to attract and retain the staff (needed) to fulfill their mission".

The Charter forbids acts of bribery or corruption, gender harassment, sexual exploitation and discrimination; and calls for protection of whistle-blowers. It requires signatories to break links with partner organisations or individuals involved in illegal or unethical practices.

► Jim Lobe



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From Gaborone 2004 to Glasgow 2006

“War on Terror Is Undermining Democracy”

At the five-day CIVICUS World Assembly “we’ll be looking at civil society activists who are in prison. We believe there are several hundred of them across the world. We will be highlighting 14 of them,” Kumi Naidoo, CIVICUS secretary general, told IPS.

“We’ll also look at the war on terror and how it is undermining democratic space... The war on terror is undermining the tenets of democracy by subjecting (people) to detentions and profiling,” he said.

“The war on terror is sending people into the hands of the terrorists.”

U.S. President George Bush declared war on terror after the bombings in New York and Washington in September 2001 by al Qaeda operatives. Human rights groups such as Amnesty International believe that since then hundreds of suspects have been detained, particularly in Asia and the Middle East.

“After Botswana, the CIVICUS board felt that we should keep that theme. It’s not time-bound,” Naidoo explained.

Other Issues

However, change is coming in the form of an altered schedule for the assembly, to be held annually now instead of every two years.

Representatives of civil society groups interviewed by IPS also hope that issues such as the AIDS pandemic, poverty and corruption will be thoroughly debated at the World Assembly.

“Poverty is a threat to development; it affects a lot of things. For example, if you have poverty in the country... it breeds other things like



Since Gaborone 2004, not much has changed in the international civil society agenda: human rights violations, conflict, underdevelopment, poverty and injustice are all still there. And so is determination to bring about change

crime and civil strife,” said Barbara Kalima-Phiri, programme manager for the Pretoria-based Southern African Regional Poverty Network.

Over 300 million people live on less than a dollar a day in Africa, she added.

Peace

For Peter Kagwanja, director of the Southern African Project of the International Crisis Group — a think tank headquartered in Brussels — the matter of security needs attention.

“Peace and security are prerequisites for development. They are preconditions for the continent’s revival,” he told IPS.

Several African countries are in the grip of conflict at present, including Somalia, Sudan, the

Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d’Ivoire and Chad.

And, the seeds of future violence risk being sown in others.

“There is no active conflict in Southern Africa. But we have cases of misgovernance like Zimbabwe, which has the potential for conflict,” said Kagwanja.

“We have Angola, which has emerged from conflict but which has not yet fully recovered: its stability is in question. You need elections and democracy to sustain it. You also need development...”

Kagwanja urged civil society to help maintain the peace in Southern Africa.

Effectiveness

But Margaret Legum, director of the Cape Town-based South

African New Economics Network sounds a note of caution about the ultimate effectiveness of civil society.

“Civil societies support equalities and decent societies, but they find it difficult to influence governments. Civil societies are financially weak compared to the corporate sector,” she said.

“The thing that most depresses me is that governments are impotent in the face of corporate sectors, which are able to move their money around the world,” Legum noted. “All governments are afraid of big businesses. They fear that the big businesses will take away their money.”

But, “governments should become courageous. They should pass laws to prevent big businesses from moving money out of the country,” she added.

► Moyiga Nduru Johannesburg

Afghanistan

From Search-and-Destroy to Reconciliation?

A day before the spectacular arrests of 17 Muslim men under Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act, a McMaster University professor now working in Afghanistan was in Ottawa to tell Canadian officials that their war against the Taliban is ill-advised.

Dr. Seddiq Weera, an adviser to the Kabul-based National Commission on Strengthening Peace in Afghanistan, is in a position to know. After visiting senior members of the Taliban, he concluded that the insurgents are ready to negotiate and that persisting in efforts to keep the losing sides in the civil war from participating fully in Afghan life will only intensify the violence.

Deaf Ears

In a recent telephone interview, the soft-spoken peace studies professor, now on a brief visit home to see his family in Burlington, says he has had better luck talking about reconciliation possibilities to officials in Kabul than he has had in Ottawa.

Ten out of 25 ministers in the Afghan cabinet, he says, support his proposal for a national-level process of dialogue and national reconciliation leading to the resolution of regional grievances and a peace agreement.

As one Northern Alliance leader, Mohammad Yunus Qanoni, confided to him recently, "Good or bad, we may have to live with [Taliban leader] Mullah Omar."

Weera, a Canadian citizen of Afghan origin, comes with some impressive credentials. He was jailed twice, at one point for four years, by the Soviet-supported regime that ruled Afghanistan before the Taliban came to power.

His work for the commission has taken him on risky journeys to discover how former fighters for the Taliban, as well as current insurgents in the hills, can be reconciled

to the new regime.

He has found that unfinished business from the five-year civil war in Afghanistan prior to the Sep. 11, 2001 attacks, which pitted the Northern Alliance against the Taliban and the forces of warlord-ally Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, is a major barrier to peace and reconciliation.

"There are people who are unhappy with the government, and they have issues that are related to being treated unjustly, unfairly," he said.

Angels and Evil

Weera argues that the 2001 Bonn Agreement that helped put Hamid Karzai and the Northern Alliance in power made insufficient allowances for dealing with the losing side, setting up a situation where they became "excluded and marginalised".

Winners of the civil war became the "angels" while the losers were deemed "evil", even though unsavoury and hard-line elements, includ-

ing war criminals, have existed in all the fighting factions, he said.

Ideologues in the Taliban and al Qaeda, Weera maintains, represent a minority among the violent opponents of Kabul. He says it's a mistake for Canadian and U.S. military and political leaders to paint all the insurgents with the terrorist brush, as is the strategy of the search-and-destroy missions of the U.S.-led Enduring Freedom campaign in the Kandahar region of Afghanistan.

"That distinction should be made between those who have national and Afghan issues and can be accommodated through peace and dialogue, and those who are terrorists and hardliners and drug lords," Weera argued.

In conversations with insurgents, he has discovered a range of motives. "I put the question to them: 'What will it take for all of you to return and lead peaceful lives?' And that was where I found out

there are issues that can be settled within the current system."

"Not all of them are asking that all internationals should leave. They want a safe return. What they mean by that is 'We don't feel safe from our former enemy; when we come back they are going to conspire against us and shoot us from behind. We don't want to surrender; we want to go back with dignity'."

New Commission

At the core of Weera's proposal is a new commission with a broader mandate than the one he works for. "Why not invest in a national peace initiative that can be a preventive measure? It will reduce the hostilities, isolate the terrorists and reduce the number of troops needed," he told IPS.

Afghanistan is going to require assistance in peace-building in the form of expertise and financial help, he says. Meanwhile, the Canadian government has urged him to wait until 2008, when something called the Afghan National Development Strategy is slated to begin.

Weera is not sure that either Afghans or the families of the 2,200 Canadians fighting in Kandahar under Enduring Freedom can afford the delay. "It is totally immoral to wait until more and more people are killed," he said.

The supporters of dialogue will also have to get the neighbouring government of Pakistan on board because of its concerns about alleged Indian government influence in Afghanistan, states Weera.

Meanwhile, the recent anti-U.S. and anti-Karzai riots in Kabul, stemming from an accident involving a U.S. military convey that was ploughing through some busy city streets, represent a warning sign, he adds, where one group feeling excluded took advantage of the local anger towards the deaths of civilians.

"It was a show of power to the government, certainly. It is not a huge deal, but it tells us again there are hostilities, there are uncertainties among the groups."



The right answer?

► Paul Weinberg Toronto

Financial Squeeze on U.S. Nonprofits

More Poor on their Own?



U.S. President Bush's 2007-2012 budget would cut federal spending on programmes of interest to nonprofits (outside of the massive Medicare and Medicaid programmes) by 78.6 billion dollars after inflation. If nonprofits are forced to stretch themselves thinner, and perhaps raise their fees, they may price themselves beyond the reach of many people.

According to economist Jared Bernstein, the United States has entered the brave new era of the “YOYO” economy — i.e., “You’re On Your Own”.

And if President George W. Bush gets his way in the five-year budget proposal now before Congress, those at the bottom of the economic ladder may be more on their own than ever before.

From senior centres to soup kitchens and housing for the homeless, millions of people have come to rely on the services provided by the nation’s more than 837,000 nonprofit organisations.

But a recent analysis by Alan

Abramson, director of the nonprofit sector and philanthropy programme at the Aspen Institute, a Washington-based think-tank, finds that Bush’s 2007-2012 budget would cut federal spending on programmes of interest to nonprofits, outside of the massive Medicare and Medicaid programmes, by 78.6 billion dollars after inflation.

Hitting the Poor

Spending on social welfare programmes, such as job training and community development, would be slashed by 13.6 billion dollars, and a total of 27.2 billion dollars would be cut from a wide ar-

ray of housing, cash, and food assistance initiatives.

Direct federal funding of nonprofits, excluding support of health services providers, would fall by 14.3 billion dollars.

“Nonprofits are not important in and of themselves, but because of the people they serve,” Abramson said in an interview. “And government support is very important in the balance sheet. If nonprofits are forced to stretch themselves thinner, and perhaps raise their fees, they may price themselves beyond the reach of many people.”

Boom Over

The 1990s were a boom period for nonprofits in the United States. From 1992 to 2002, the number of charitable organisations registered with the Internal Revenue Service soared from 516,554 to 909,574 — a 76-percent increase. Much of this expansion was directly due to increased levels of state and government funding.

“But starting last year, we saw a changing budget scenario at the federal level,” Abramson said. “There was more concern about the deficit, as well as pressure to spend on the (Iraq) war and homeland security.”

Abramson estimates that about 20 percent of nonprofits’ resources come from private giving, including individuals, foundations and businesses, 30 percent comes from the state and federal government, while 40 to 50 percent is earned from service fees.

“Federal budget cuts do have a major impact,” agreed Erica

Greeley, deputy director of the National Council of Nonprofit Associations, which has over 22,000 members in 45 states and Washington, DC.

“There is no way that private giving can make up the difference,” she told IPS. “While some nonprofits are trying strategies that may be very innovative and entrepreneurial, their historical role is to provide services for those who can’t pay for them.”

“If the government outsources its safety net services and looks to nonprofits, while at the same time it is cutting their budgets, there will inevitably be a segment of society that is left out,” Greeley said.



President Bush: emotional on wars, less so on social gaps

Inequality

This is especially bad news in light of the country’s widening income gap. According to the latest Federal Reserve report issued last month, the richest one percent of U.S. citizens now own a bigger piece of the pie (33.4 percent) than the poorest 90 percent together (30.4 percent).

Greeley argues that rather than judging social programmes according to easily measured outcomes, policy-makers should take a more cost-benefit, preventive approach.

“In California, for example, it was discovered that the majority of people in juvenile detention went through the foster care system,” she said. “One of the biggest draws on California’s budget is prisons. If you do the math, investing in the foster care system would clean up the juvenile justice system — but they’re having a hard time grappling with that.”

Since the 1980s, there has been a policy shift from funding nonprofits directly to giving money to individuals in the form of vouchers. While this offers greater choice, it also means that charities are forced

to spend money wooing potential clients, and in some cases, people actually end up with fewer services.

“The bottom line is that communities have needs and they should be met,” Greeley said. “The best way to do this is a partnership between business, government and nonprofits. Each is best positioned to do certain things, so they need to come together and support what needs to happen.”

Deborah Weinstein of the Coalition on Human Needs, an alliance of civil rights, religious, labour and professional groups, said that even some of the biggest nonprofits, like Catholic Charities USA, have been “completely up front in saying that they provide vital services, in partnership with all levels of government, and you can’t take that money away and expect them to do their work.”

Discrimination

New roadblocks are being set up that “make it harder for people to climb out of poverty and to reach stability,” she told IPS. “Besides the fact that funds are diminishing, some programmes

are now seeking proof of citizenship as a back door to deny services to truly eligible but low-income people — such as poor, older African Americans born in the south, not in hospitals, without birth certificates and no money to get them.”

“We are headed for very difficult times,” Weinstein said. “The good news is that the states don’t have as big budget gaps and revenues have started to pick up. But at the federal level, the reckless passage of tax cut after tax cut on borrowed money means tremendous pressure to make budget cuts that will in turn affect nonprofits.”

Indeed, the Centre on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that new tax cuts in Bush’s 2007 budget will cost the states 38 billion dollars over the next 10 years. By 2016, they would lose 8.1 billion dollars in revenues annually.

Helmut Anheier directs the Centre for Civil Society at the University of California, Los Angeles, which helps train local and regional nonprofits in leadership and capacity building. He says he is “mildly opti-

mistic” about the future of nonprofits in the state.

“If you look at Los Angeles, the whole nonprofit field is much less developed compared to the (U.S.) East Coast,” he said. “State and local governments have historically played a more direct role in providing basic social services.”

“That’s changed over the last 20 years — nonprofits are growing, but the population is growing faster, and they are forced to play catch-up. Because of California’s recent budget crisis, it’s been a roller coaster. We’re now in a transition period, where the government wants to learn, but doesn’t quite know how to pass on responsibilities.”

Global Impasse

Anheier is one of the participants at the CIVICUS World Assembly.

“After the Cold War, the genie was out of the bottle,” Anheier said. “There is one superpower, and many people disagree with it, but the U.N. is ineffective and the question is what can the people of the world do with a system that is unwilling to reform itself? That’s what CIVICUS is about.”

“And that’s where civil society comes in. We have a similar thing happening in California,” he noted. “The federal government is not charting a course for society, so the state government and nonprofits are moving into this void. Still, I would like to see a much more visionary framework in place.”

Jared Bernstein’s new book, “All Together Now: Common Sense for a Fair Economy”, puts it this way: replace the YOYO economy with a society based on the idea of “WITT” — We’re All In This Together.”

► **Katherine Stapp** New York

No New Ideas from Davos, No Action from Porto Alegre

Each year, on the occasion of the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF), executives from the world's richest corporations, political leaders, intellectuals, and journalists meet in Davos, Switzerland — about 2000 people in all.

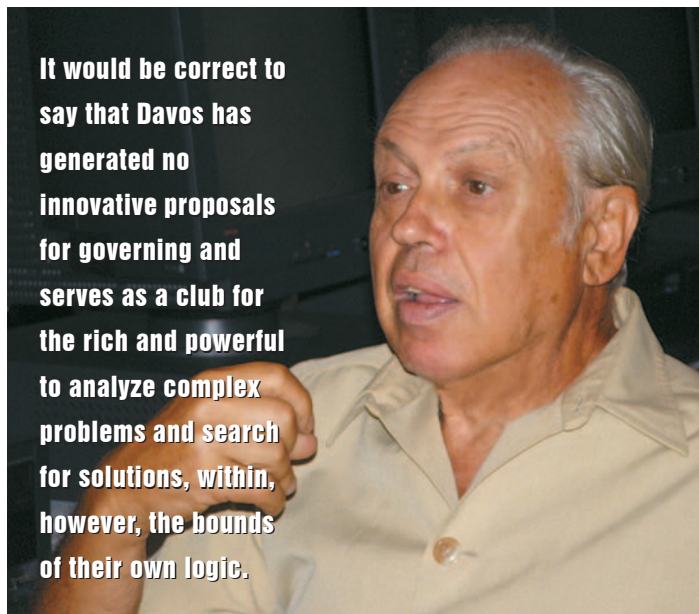
The WEF, founded in 1971 by Klaus Schwab, Swiss professor of business politics, is according to its supporters the ideal occasion for representatives of the world's major political and economic organisations to debate the great problems of the day.

About 600 journalists attend and have access to the majority of the sessions. Though most of the participants come from the world of politics and transnational corporations, certain major NGOs also participate, such as Amnesty International, Transparency International, and Oxfam, as well as union and religious leaders.

Opponents of the WEF hold that in reality the meeting is no more than a business forum where corporations can network and lobby and where the true goal is boosting profits and definitely not reducing poverty.

Despite its name, the WEF is dominated by Europeans, Americans, and Japanese: in 2002, 75 percent of attendees were from Europe (39 percent) and the US (36 percent), which constitute a mere 17 percent of the world's population. In contrast, a mere 7.7 percent of the forum were from Asia, home to 60 percent of the global population. Only those corporations with income of over one billion dollars are invited, which means that businesses from the developing world are

It would be correct to say that Davos has generated no innovative proposals for governing and serves as a club for the rich and powerful to analyze complex problems and search for solutions, within, however, the bounds of their own logic.



sharply under-represented.

NGOs are present because the WEF has tried to open up a dialogue with its opponents. But two NGOs, Friends of the Earth and Focus on the Global South, were not invited back because they were considered too critical and harsh, while Greenpeace, which has sought to spur dialogue on global warming, withdrew because it found the forum was not cooperative.

However, the WEF has always sustained that it accepts peaceful criticism and has held a series of dialogues with groups from its rival, the World Social Forum (WSF) of Porto Alegre; for this reason, the WEF claims, it created the Open Forum in 2003, which allowed 300 participants to attend without charge.

The WSF, which has been held since 2001, presented a new problem for the WEF because it is not comprised of violent activists or

traditional social elements inclined more towards action than reflection. Instead the WSF is made up of intellectuals, historians, and economists united by the belief that another world is possible. Their critique of the WEF — that it represents the beneficiaries of free-market globalisation while excluding the less fortunate of the North and the vast majority of the people of the South — is taken into account by Schwab.

In effect, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the WEF has been the sounding board of the so-called Washington Consensus, the agreement between the US government, the IMF, and the World Bank which made neoliberal globalisation into the strategic model for new international relations and pushed all of the Third World to undertake programmes of across-the-board privatisation and unilateral liberalisation of

trade, finance, and services.

With great skill, Schwab progressively introduced the issues of the WSF into the WEF: poverty, the claims of the South, discussion of agricultural protectionism and the distortion of the free market. He even brought in stars from the entertainment world to speak on the issues of civil society.

It would be correct to say that Davos has generated no innovative proposals for governing and serves as a club for the rich and powerful to analyze complex problems and search for solutions, within, however, the bounds of their own logic. Despite its current openness to new issues, no one today expects ideas and proposals from the WEF or anything more than the great opportunity for socialising it offers its participants.

Assessing the WSF is more complex. Without a doubt participation in the Forum has reached unprecedented levels, topping 100,000 participants, but it has entered a crisis of growth and identity and perhaps a transition to new forms.

Davos and Porto Alegre are both separate actors and at the same time symptoms of their respective worlds. The WEF has the power but faces a crisis of legitimacy. And just as it cannot be said that the WEF has generated new ideas, it is certain that the WSF represents the eruption of a new phase of idealism and commitment in the world.

Roberto Savio, president emeritus of IPS news agency, is a member of the International Council of the World Social Forum

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Rights

Iraq Exodus Ends Four-Year Decline in Refugees

Less protection but more threats and greater barriers. The world's poorest countries host 75 percent of the world's refugee population of 12 million.

An exodus of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis escaping growing violence in their homeland last year increased the total number of refugees around the world to some 12 million, according to the World Refugee Survey 2006 released by the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

That total marked a reversal of a four-year trend of declining numbers of refugees. From 2001 to the end of 2004, the total number of people who crossed international borders in search of a safe haven from persecution or war fell from nearly 15 million to 11.5 million, according to the report.

"The increase is largely due to 650,000 more Iraqi refugees who have fled to Jordan and Syria," said USCRI's president, Lavinia Limon. "Although some Iraqis may be fleeing generalised violence, individuals and groups are targeted on the basis of political affiliation, professions, ethnic, or religious differences — the definition of a refugee."

Deportations

"By all measures, refugee protection has deteriorated worldwide," said Gregory Chen, USCRI's director of policy analysis and research. "Far too many governments forced



Congo: long march to nowhere

refugees back to unsafe home countries where they faced persecution, fighting and conflict."

He cited Russia's deportation of 16,000 asylum seekers last year, its failure to grant hundreds of Uzbeks asylum after they fled a May 2005 massacre in Andijan, and the deportation by China of some 5,000 North Koreans as among the worst cases.

He also cited Burundi's forcible repatriation of more than 5,000 Rwandan asylum-seekers, the U.S.'s repatriation of 1,800 Haitians without granting them a fair opportunity to assert their asylum claims, and Egypt's deadly crackdown on Sudanese refugee protests as significant violations of the U.N. 1951 Refugee Convention.

The Good Guys

On the brighter side, the 110-page report, which annually grades some 50 key countries on their respect for rights under the convention, gave its highest marks to Benin, which hosts some 40,000 Togolese refugees; Venezuela, which has taken in an estimated 180,000 Colombians; and Canada for its treatment of refugees.

Aside from the outflow of at least 400,000 Iraqis — by far the most significant source of the estimated 1.05 million new refugees during 2005 — the report noted that the most significant changes over the year included returns of some 740,000 Afghans from Pakistan and Iran.

Palestinians remained the largest source of refugees, at nearly three million, about one third of whom live in camps in Gaza; 700,000 on the West Bank; 512,000 in Syria; 257,000 in Lebanon; 240,000 in Saudi Arabia; 158,000 in Jordan; and about 50,000 in Iraq and Kuwait.

But the third biggest source of refugees is now Iraq itself, displacing several countries, including Burma/Myanmar, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi that were ranked higher in recent years, the report found.

Iraqi Crisis

It estimated the total number of Iraqi refugees living abroad as of the end of 2005 at nearly 900,000. Of these, Jordan hosted about half; fol-

lowed by Syria, with some 350,000, Iran with 54,000, and Lebanon with about 10,000.

Not all of these refugees fled during 2005, the report stressed, noting that it had not designated fleeing Iraqis as refugees since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003 until the U.N. declared they should be given refugee protections last year.

But USCRI said it estimated that at least half of those currently in Jordan and Syria are believed to have left in 2005. The group cited estimates that over 40 percent of Iraq's professional class have left the country, and given the intensification of sectarian conflict since earlier this year, it anticipated an increase in the outflow. In the last 10 months, according to USCRI, the Iraqi government has issued more than two million passports.

In addition, the report estimated the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq last year at 1.3 million. Only Sudan (5.3 million), Colombia (2.9 million), Uganda (1.7 million), and the DRC (1.7 million) had more.

Aside from Iraq, the most significant movements of refugees during 2005 included the movement of estimated 100,000 Nepalis to India and more than 60,000 Sudanese to Uganda and Chad.

New Barriers

As it has in the recent past, the report also scored European Union and other western countries for erecting new barriers to asylum seekers. While the West contributes the most money by far to international refugee aid agencies, it noted, they host only four percent of the global refugee population — less than half a million people.

Conversely, world's poorest countries — those with per capita annual incomes less than 2,000 dollars — host more than eight million refugees, or nearly 75 percent of the global refugee population.

► **Jim Lobe** Washington

EC/ECHO/François Goemans

While England plays the World Cup



SCVO's
Martin Sime
(right) with
Finn Heinrich
from CIVICUS

And Here Scotland Scores

Civil society is upsurging in the northern part of the UK, where post-industrialism brought yet a deeper gap between rich and poor.

It must be rude of course to mention these days that England is playing the World Cup and Scotland is not. But what else could be a more ready reminder these days how distinctly different Scotland can be from England.

That difference became constitutional with the birth of the new Scottish parliament in 1999, some time after the older one merged with the English parliament in London in 1707 and created United Kingdom. Today, football and parliament both tell a story of separateness, even if the exclusion from the World Cup is not so nice, and the Scottish parliament sits in a strange sort of building.

Civil Society

What is most distinctly Scot is of course the people themselves,

and some of the uniqueness of being Scot is emerging through the way that people are organising themselves, in large and growing measure through civil society.

"At least four new civil society organisations are formed every working day," says Martin Sime, chief executive of the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations. "There are over 50,000 organisations in our country of 5 million people. Scotland has a long history of civil society dating back over centuries but there has been an upsurge recently."

That upsurge is riding difficulties within the new wealth. "The Scotland of today is largely post-industrial and increasingly affluent for many, but with a growing gap between rich and poor," Sime told IPS.

And the new parliament has not delivered just about everything. "A new Parliament with significant devolved responsibility has brought new energy into the democratic process but this is offset by a growing alienation from politics and politicians," Sime said.

Enter civil society. "Civil society is energetically engaged at all levels, is largely well resourced,

and is growing its service delivery role, most notably in housing and care. A strong thread of mutualism runs through much of its work."

The creation of a separate Scottish parliament was itself substantially the result of civil society efforts.

"It worked closely with policy makers to establish the devolved systems and has been closing contributing to initiatives and reviews of legislation in the Scottish parliament," Farah Kabir, consultant for participative democracy with the British Council Scotland told IPS.

"There has been contribution through campaigns such as the ones developed and run by Zero Tolerance against violence against women. It ran the campaign for 10 years and has now broadened the theme by developing information and material for schools around RESPECT — raising awareness on self-respect, respect for diversity and other related matters."

Honeymoon Finished

Civil society itself had more support from parliament earlier. "There was a honeymoon period immediately post setting up of the

parliament, and the Civic Forum, the umbrella organisation of civil society organisation — other than SCVO — got both moral and financial support from the parliament. It has fallen out of favour and

is struggling to keep its presence."

That has not led to a weakness of civil society itself, she said. "I would say without any hesitance

the civil society in Scotland acts as a watch and conscience of the Scottish population," Kabir said. "There are so many stories that can be shared like the work of the organisations like Children First or Age concern, or Shakti and Nari Kalayan Sanghata that are made up of individuals from the civil society having come together to promote a cause or address an issue."

Not Enough

But civil society is not doing enough to tackle "the problems and concerns of those in poverty, and the young who lack role models and incentive to change their lives," Kabir said. "Of course, there is also the problem of not enough resources or proper distribution of resources to deal with the immediate problem, as well as take a long-term view."

Scottish civil society is addressing the particular concerns of Scottish society in its own and increasingly more energetic ways. That makes Glasgow a particularly appropriate location for an assembly of civil society groups from around the world.

Civil society from Scotland will be out in strength at the Civicus world assembly of civil society in Glasgow next week. It will be a time to share knowledge of what has worked, and explore ways to tackle what has not.

► Sanjay Suri London

In September 2000, world leaders gathered at the United Nations for the Millennium Assembly promised to halve extreme hunger and poverty, halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and provide universal primary education, all by 2015.

The series of targets, known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), also include promoting gender equality, reducing child and maternal mortality, ensuring environmental sustainability and building a global partnership for development.

Salil Shetty, who will address the CIVICUS World Assembly, is the director of the U.N. Millennium Campaign to help achieve these goals. With less than a decade to go before the deadline, he spoke to IPS/TV about the current status of the MDGs.

Ten Years, Eight Goals, No Time to Waste

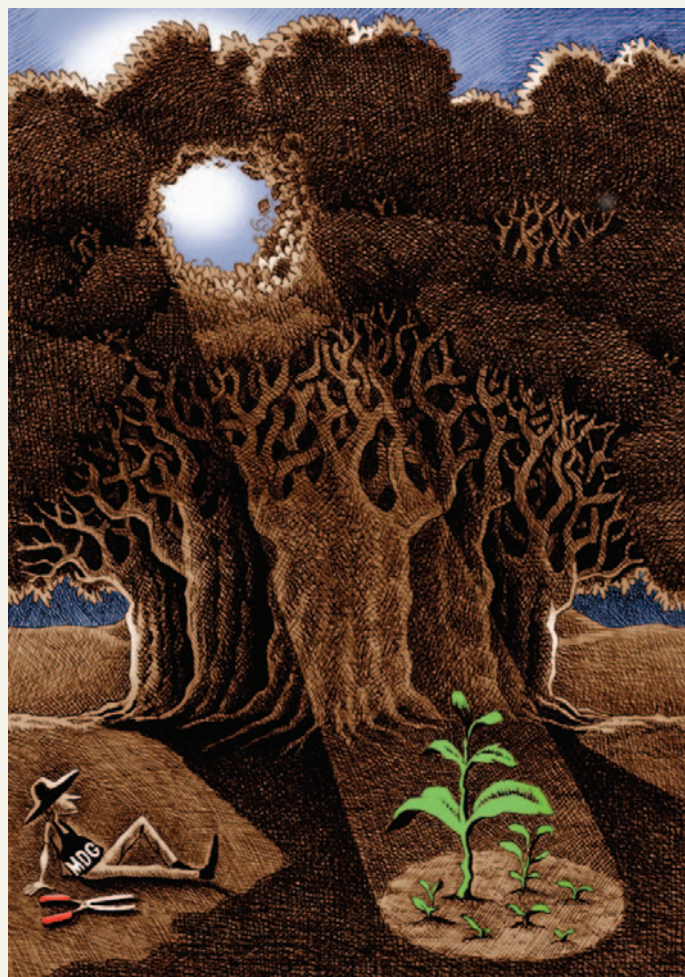
IPS/TV: Has progress been made toward achieving the MDGs since they were agreed upon by world governments in 2000?

SS: There is no question that there has been quite spectacular progress in the last decade or so in relation to almost every one of the goals at the global level. Whether we are satisfied with the progress or not is based on whether we individually belong to the “glass half full” or “glass half empty” schools.

The Millennium Campaign has always been interested in looking at the goals beyond the aggregates. So, for example, it’s great that at the global level we are on track to meeting the first goal on halving poverty by 2015. But the goals are quite minimalistic and we should look for nothing less than every goal being met in every country by 2015.

We cannot hide behind the aggregate numbers looking good simply because of significant changes in China and India on this goal. Even within large countries like India, China, Nigeria and Brazil, it’s not enough if the national averages look good, we have to judge performance in the poorest parts of the country and for the most excluded social groups.

The good news is that we now have evidence that even some of the poorest countries in the world like Bangladesh and Mozambique have been able to make very good progress on some of the most difficult health indicators.



The bottom line is that any country where the leaders are serious about realising the goals in the next 10 years can in fact make it happen. If you look at it this way, then we have to be appalled that South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, where most of the world’s poor people live, are not moving more quickly enough towards achieving these goals.

In Latin America and increasingly in many other parts of the

world, the real challenge is growing inequality.

IPS/TV: What strategies is the Millennium Campaign employing to accomplish the goals on time?

SS: The Millennium Campaign’s mandate is to take the goals to the people. These goals cannot be met in the corridors of the U.N. in New York or indeed even by governments acting on their own.

The first thing to deal with is

the lack of information and awareness. Most people in developing countries don't know that their governments have made these commitments and that in fact they have a right to demand for these goals to be met. Similarly in the rich countries, citizens are not aware that their governments have committed themselves to Goal 8 — more and better aid, debt cancellation and trade justice.

Citizens and people's groups at the local and national level are the ones who can and should hold their governments accountable. We work in close partnership with a wide range of mass-based organisations including women's organisations, youth groups, faith-based organisations, trade unions, social movements, NGOs etc. towards this end. Some of the most powerful partnerships we have are with local governments and parliamentarians.

Our partners have now established national campaigns in over 60 countries in the North and South demanding that the MDGs are met and poverty is eradicated.

IPS/TV: Have the MDGs been translated into national action plans? How do you suggest that this process be accelerated?

SS: All countries were meant to adapt the global goals into national ones and develop plans for the achievement of their national goals, right from the outset. This requirement was reaffirmed at the World Summit of the U.N. General Assembly in September 2005 and governments have committed themselves to do this by December 2006.

In reality, some countries like Vietnam have already developed goals and already focus their na-

tional planning process around them. But in most countries, this is yet to happen and the U.N. system has this as a high priority in the coming months.

IPS/TV: Though many rich countries give huge amounts of aid to developing countries, the effect of some rich nations' policies on development has been criticised. What kinds of changes can rich nations make so that their aid does not hurt those it is aiming to help?

SS: It is absolutely true that most rich countries have not met their commitments on aid volume and debt cancellation. The quality of a lot of the aid is atrocious. But thanks to some forward-thinking leadership, at least in part pushed by the strong public campaigns in 2005, the clock has turned on aid volumes and debt cancellation. Slowly, but surely. This is particularly true in Europe. On aid quality and trade, not much has moved though and we have to keep the pressure on. At the same time, it is very fashionable and politically correct to always externalise the problems faced by developing countries by blaming rich countries. I am not sure for how much longer we can sustain this argument and let our own leaders and elite off the hook.

IPS/TV: Is civil society actively integrated into the U.N.'s Millennium Campaign or have they been sidelined as they are during many government initiatives?

SS: I think this question has already been answered. Our premise is that governments will only listen to their voters and that all politics is local. The MDGs have to

All countries were meant to adapt the global goals into national ones. Some countries like Vietnam have already developed goals and already focus their national planning process around them. But in most countries, this is yet to happen.

become vote-getting political capital. So organisations that work with citizens and people at the local and national level are the ones that can hold their governments to account. These organisations are indeed at the forefront of the MDG campaigns across the world today.

IPS/TV: At the CIVICUS World Assembly, will you be proposing any methods by which civil society can work with governments and contribute to achieving the MDGs faster?

SS: In 2006-8 our focus is very much on national and local level accountability. This year, we have tied up with the Guinness Book of World Records to set a world record on the number of people who will "Stand Up Against Poverty" and "Stand Up for the MDGs" on Oct. 15. This will be a massive mobilisation across the world in conjunction with a whole lot of activities that are being planned by many of our partners from Sep. 15 onwards culminating on Oct. 17 which will be the

global White Band Day in 2006.

IPS/TV: The Global Call to Action Against Poverty has mobilised millions of people across the world. Are governments listening?

SS: The GCAP is primarily the coming together of national civil society-led campaigns on the MDGs and poverty eradication. The Millennium Campaign has played a vital supportive role in making this happen. I do believe that the efforts of the national campaigns have started yielding fruit from the UK and the U.S. to Zambia and Japan. But we still have a long way to go before we can have sustained people's campaigns on the MDGs and poverty eradication across the world, to which governments will have no choice but listen.

IPS/TV: Do you think the MDGs are broad enough to address the multitude of problems faced on the ground by the world's poorest people?

SS: The MDGs themselves have deliberately been made very specific and focused on the essential needs of the poorest people in the world. If you talk to poor people across the world, you can be sure that livelihood, food, health, education, water and sanitation and a natural environment that supports their life, are indeed their top priorities. But in order to deal with the causes of deprivation, inequality and injustice, the Goals have to be interpreted within the broader framework of human rights and the broader U.N. development agenda as spelled out in the Millennium Declaration.

► **Mithre J. Sandrasagra**

While their protest marches and occupations of government and business offices recall the struggles of landless campesinos, this group of Brazilian farmers are drawing attention to a distinct facet of agrarian reform. These workers have mobilised to hold onto the land they own and build a more just and environmentally sound society.

The Small Farmers Movement (MPA) has incorporated many new organisational ways of fighting economic and social injustice.

The activists stepped up their protests this year, “with very positive results,” Aurio Scherer, an MPA coordinator, based in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul, told IPS.

Following the most recent protests, held May 23 and 24, the government granted payment deferrals for investment loans and reduced debts taken on to pay for production expenses. Weather problems and falling prices have triggered several bankruptcies, and Minister of Agrarian Development Guilherme Cassel has acknowledged that there is a farm price crisis.

Pensions

Another “major step forward” was, according to Scherer, the government’s promise to make the temporary social security provisions for rural communities a permanent law, consolidating one of Brazil’s main income-redistribution policies, by allowing campesinos to retire at the age of 60 for men and 55 for women and draw a pension equivalent to the minimum wage of 155 dollars a month.

These are some of the concrete results achieved by the relatively new organisation, which in just a few years has attracted national support in an agrarian sector dominated by export-oriented agribusiness and plagued by growing social and economic imbalances.

But even these successes reveal only part of the organisation’s scope. In specific terms, the MPA

Brazil

Innovative Small Farmers Set to Redefine Development

Since 1996, the Brazilian small farmers movement is opening a new path in agricultural development, incorporating broader, socially conscious ideals, such as salvaging and validating the campesino way of life through grassroots agrarian development projects. With a hands-on, practical approach, it organises farmers, providing support in their daily struggles to improve their quality of life and overcome the threat posed by agribusiness.

Paulino Menezes



addresses the day-to-day struggle to foster price, trade and credit policies favourable to small farmers, who are constantly threatened by climatic and market fluctuations. However, since its inception in 1996, the organisation has also incorporated broader, socially conscious ideals, such as salvaging and validating the campesino way of life through grassroots agrarian development projects.

Alternative Model

With a hands-on, practical approach, the MPA organises farmers, providing support in their daily struggles to improve their quality of life and overcome the threat posed by agribusiness - that is, the expansion of monoculture export crops.

“We are defending an alternate production and technological model, based on campesino methods and agroecology,” Altacir Bunde, a national MPA leader, explained to IPS.

Campesino agriculture is also the environmental opposite of agribusiness, which shows “absolutely no respect” for its surroundings, exhausts natural resources, and subjects campesinos, indigenous communities and other traditional rural groups to various forms of violence, said Horacio Martins de Carvalho, an agronomist who specialises in rural social issues.

In contrast, agroecology, in addition to promoting environmentally friendly farming, provides “healthy food” to the popu-

ages the “integration” of small producers into agroindustry, a trend particularly visible in tobacco production.

The movement is fighting to eradicate the “semi-slavery” that multinational companies impose on tobacco farmers, said Scherer. Big business creates a state of total dependency: the industry sells supplies at higher-than-market prices and even provides credit to small family farmers, “trapping” them in debt, he explained.

Still, tobacco farming is one of the most profitable activities for small family-owned farms and employs 100,000 families in Rio Grande do Sul, he acknowledged. Thus, its replacement by other crops must be “slow and gradual,” he said, but it has already started, partly because aggressive health policies have helped reduce tobacco consumption.

The fledgling MPA set down its first roots in this very state, at the southernmost reaches of Brazil, home to a significant population of small farmers, most of whom are descendants of European immigrants.

A severe drought that began in 1995 severely damaged local agriculture. In response, more than 25,000 bankrupt farmers gathered in “drought camps”, where the movement was born.

Unionism Obsolete

Scherer abandoned his union activities in favour of the MPA. “Unionism had become obsolete, complacent and slow,” and offered no answers to the problems faced by campesinos, partly because each union’s activity is limited to its municipality, whereas the movement is a more flexible, less hierarchical organisation, he explained.

The MPA thus distances itself from unions, such as the National Confederation of Agricultural

Workers, and has instead formed alliances with the Landless Workers Movement (MST) and other organisations in *Via Campesina*, a global network of rural social movements.

Thus, as the struggle of landless workers has gained significant ground in past decades through the MST’s new organisational approach, which has been adopted in many Latin American countries, the equally innovative structure of the MPA has managed to unite a sector traditionally isolated by its inherently rural environment.

The main distinction, of course, is that in the MPA the small farmers “own land and are fighting to hold onto it,” in the face of policies that prioritise agribusiness, said Scherer.

The MPA is organised in “base groups” in rural communities, with an average of 10 to 15 families, represented in municipal networks, and even regional groups of municipalities, explained Bunde. This form of collective leadership, another feature of the movement, is also represented at the state and national levels.

While it started off slow, since gaining strong support in five states by 2000, the MPA movement has taken off in popularity, and is now active in 19 of Brazil’s 26 states, and ready to take on broader challenges.

Brazil’s boom in vegetable-based fuels, such as ethanol and biodiesel, is an excellent opportunity for rural agriculture. It would be “a strategic move to link agroecological food production with renewable biomass energy,” avoiding the situation that for 30 years has characterised Brazil’s alcohol-based fuel industry, which is completely dominated by big sugarcane agribusiness, said Scherer.

► **Mario Osava** Rio de Janeiro

Harvesting sugar cane: hard work pays off for organised small farmers

lation — another of the movement’s goals.

Campesinos represent “a wide variety of ways of being, living and producing that run contrary to corporate agribusiness,” and are thus “the only social actors who can effect social change in rural areas,” Carvalho told IPS.

The 4.1 million families dedicated to small agriculture produce 80 percent of Brazil’s food and make up 85 percent of the rural labour force, said Bunde. This sector, then, is “the key to a more egalitarian rural society,” he maintained.

Semi-slavery

The MPA is also against the concept of family agriculture, which it considers an impractical formula that undermines the survival of rural life and encour-



Strict adherents to “assembly democracy”, some 600,000 Chilean high school students achieved what 16 years of democracy could not: expose the deep inequalities promoted by a market-oriented educational system. They won, but are unable to defend their victory without political backing.

At the height of a high school students strike that shook Chile’s political pillars and the country’s love affair with its first female president, socialist Michelle Bachelet in May, a horde of bewildered reporters reminded spokeswoman Maria Huerta, only 16 years of age, that the Education Minister had been awaiting hours to meet the students’ leadership.

“Let him wait”, an unmoved Huerta replied on live national TV, “he was not elected, he represents nobody and we represent the assembly. The assembly is still debating”.

Unaware of the determination of students, Minister Martin Zilic skipped a meeting he had himself called on May 29, sending an undersecretary instead, because it was just a “financial issue”. This miscalculation may cost him dearly, since his head is considered first to roll when the crisis wanes some weeks from now.

It has already cost his job to a riot police commander who thought, along with the Interior minister and some of Bachelet closest advisers, that some generous rations of cannon-water, tear gas and beatings would scare the students and send them back home in no time.

Civil Society at its best in Chile

Penguins'



Students under siege: scenes that shocked chileans

The TV images of police officers savagely beating children prompted Bachelet, herself once a victim of the same treatment, to fire the officer and voice her outrage. But, by then, the students had rallied some 75 percent of public opinion behind them. Parents, teachers, unions, university students and a good number of parliamentarians of all political trends backed the strike and demanded meaningful change in the country’s educational system, devised by the military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet and almost intact after 16 years of democratic rule.

As it often happens in some historical events, what the usual battery of “experts” consider “impos-

sible” the day before, becomes “inevitable” on the day they happen. And soon what follows is panic, with the same experts anticipating anarchy and voicing moderation if not outright repression.

After the mishaps, the Government attempted, somewhat successfully, to retake the political initiative by responding to most of the students demands - free buses and subway passes, increase in school meals subsidies, free or reduced universities entry examinations, and, last but not least, a bill for a constitutional change, in order to ensure the “right to quality education” for all, as well as the creation of a Presidential advisory group on education, with corporate representation of private and

public schools, universities, teachers and students.

Power in action

In a telling attitude, however, Bachelet refused to meet the students and made clear that the measures she announced, totalling an extra expense of 130 million dollars, were a “decision” and not a proposal for negotiations. Soon after, Government officials unilaterally declared the strike over, while political parties and media started a heavy pressure on the students’ leadership in order to yield, attempting to create division among them.

Some 600,000 Chilean high-school students had taken to the streets staging their own “Paris

Revolution

May”, seizing over 400 schools and braving police repression. They christened themselves “penguins”, close together in their dark blue and white uniforms. And Chile undoubtedly loved their courage.

Uncertain Victory

Students did win by putting education back as one of the first political priorities of the country. They scared the political establishment by garnering widespread support. But they failed in their most precious political objective: a profound change in an educational system based almost exclusively on free market rules and entrenched in the Constitution by a dictatorial law enacted by Pinochet the very last day of his rule. Because the Government sent a bill that it knows is very unlikely to be approved, because also entrenched in that Constitution are provisions that make any such change impossible without the approval of the very forces that created the system in the first place.

Overhauling a market-and-class oriented educational system was a key component of the ruling Coalition of Parties for Democracy programme, an alliance of Socialists and Christian Democrats in their campaign against the military dictatorship of Pinochet in the 1980’s, and, although it has remained part of the agenda, like several other issues -such as truth and justice on human rights violations- it remained just as before up until “external” forces intervened

Civil society strength

In this case, the country was surprised by a wide coalition of teenagers of all segments of society, whose “spokeboys” and “spokegirls” (the oldest is 17 and half are female) demonstrated a level of political awareness, assertiveness and respect for participatory democracy that shamed many a professional politician.

Belonging to nearly all tendencies, including the extreme right and extreme left of the Chilean political spectrum, and with the active participation of their counterparts in the privileged elite private schools, the students refused to be dragged by Government officials, parliamentarians, trade unionists and politicians of all sorts to any other issue but those of their protest.

The leaders -who prefer the term spokespersons - stubbornly refuse to express any opinion not previously approved by “the as-

sembly” which groups delegates from all over the country and meets behind zealously guarded closed doors day and night in different venues.

The Pinochet-era education puts ‘freedom of taught’ over the right to education, which translates into a dual system, one for the future rulers and one for the future servants, whose destiny is thus decided from birth.

To change that law, according to the rules set for by the military regime, there must be a two-third majority in Parliament, which the ruling coalition does not have, thanks, among other things, to an electoral law also imposed by the regime, which makes it impossible for any political group to achieve such majority and leaves out of Parliament a substantial part of the electorate.

In truth, attempts to change this state of affairs have not been wholehearted on the part of the

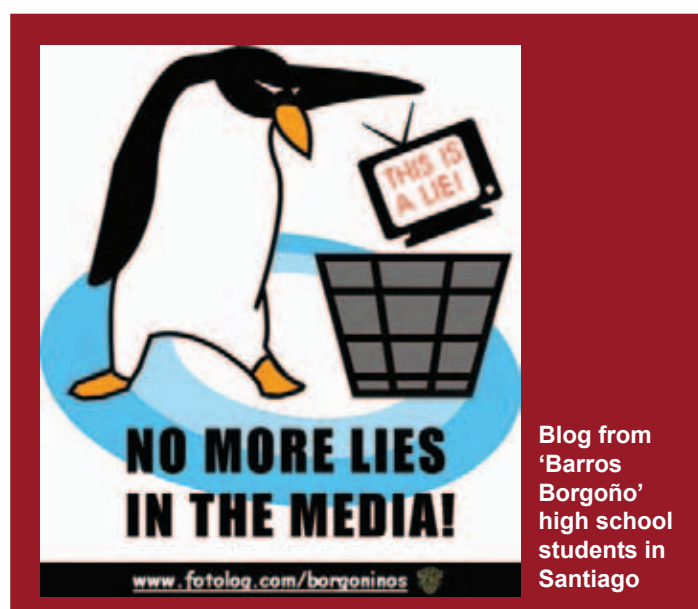
four center-left democratic governments since 1991. They knew they would not get anything from a right-wing opposition staunchly loyal to the dictator, but attempts would always be useful in the electoral curriculum. In fact, the education law was totally forgotten by all, including the radical left, in their agendas at the last presidential election held last December/January.

Notwithstanding, the chronically underestimated teens, as they peacefully seized the local office of Unesco, did not fail to underline that Bachelet’s offer of 130 million dollars, the “maximum effort”, is dwarfed by 2.5 billion dollars being spent in an array of weapons for the armed forces, on tanks, frigates, F-16 fighters and submarines, making Chile perhaps the most heavily armed country in Latin America.

Playing on political pressure, parents concerned about the safety of their children and, to be fair, listening to the students’ demands, the government is gradually re-taking control of a situation that was getting out of hand.

But that did not change what is now crystal clear to students and many others: the “system” crumbles when a social force takes the initiative. The Chilean high-school movement knows its strength and has set an example to civil society world over. What remains to be seen is how effective it can be if it is totally disconnected from political movements that can articulate other social forces towards change.

► Alejandro Kirk Santiago



Blog from
'Barros
Borgoño'
high school
students in
Santiago

Africans Wary of Closer US Embrace

US. seeking new ways to bolster trade with Africa amid fears that main beneficiaries will be US corporations.

A chorus of U.S. officials is signaling that Washington wants to turn a controversial programme giving poor African nations partial access to U.S. markets into a full-fledged free trade agreement that would open Africa's economy to U.S. corporations.

But African officials gave a lukewarm reception to the idea, while independent analysts say a free trade deal with the United States — before Africa manages to protect and strengthen its agricultural, services and industrial sectors — would be a mistake.

The fifth African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) forum held in Washington wrapped up amid U.S. calls on the 37 African nations taking part to remove barriers to U.S. trade and allow more goods and services into their markets.

In a keynote speech, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said progress against rampant African poverty is only likely through business-led growth, and argued that in most African countries, governments still stifle private business with bureaucratic red tape and high fees.

She prodded African leaders to eliminate barriers by reminding them of a U.S. proposal in September to remove most of its own bar-

riers that prohibit the free flow of goods and services as long as other nations do the same.

U.S. officials said they would prepare African nations for a potential free trade agreement through watered-down programmes like bilateral investment treaties, and trade and investment framework agreements (TIFAs) that traditionally have preceded free trade pacts.

On Wednesday, the U.S. signed a TIFA with Rwanda that covers issues important to Washington, like intellectual property and investment. The same day, Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns invited U.S. agribusiness firms to join in a trade and investment mission to the East Africa region in autumn 2006 on the sidelines of the AGOA forum.

U.S. business groups, also convened as part of the forum, say they are now focused on new opportunities, such as “untapped and diverse portfolio investment prospects” in sub-Saharan Africa.

Fair Trade Imperative

Joining the nascent lobbying for an African free trade agreement, the conservative Heritage Foundation in Washington issued a report calling on the U.S. to turn AGOA into a free trade agreement in 10 years.

The report said the U.S. should require that eligible nations incrementally lower tariffs on U.S. imports beginning in 2010, with the target of eliminating tariffs on 95 percent of goods by 2015, and demand that eligible countries eliminate tariffs on essential medicines and medical equipment by 2007.

AGOA, passed by Congress in 2000, eliminates U.S. import barriers on most of sub-Saharan Africa's main exports to the United States, particularly textiles and clothing.

But for African countries to qualify, U.S. officials must first certify that they have liberalised their economies, privatised their public assets, minimised government interference in private business and created a U.S.-style legal system. Currently,

37 of the 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have been designated as eligible for AGOA membership.

The rising calls at the forum for a wider free trade agreement dismayed critics of the original deal, who have long voiced concerns that Washington would eventually turn it around to serve its own international corporations.

“Across-the-board liberalisation and elimination of all tariffs makes no sense to Africa,” said Jessica Walker Beaumont of the American Friends Service Committee.

The U.S. free trade push in other parts of the world has been counterproductive to the poor masses and benefited only the local elites, activists say. This is because the U.S. has refused to take patents on life-saving medicines, provision of essential services, and food crops of special importance — all pivotal issues for the poor — off the trade liberalisation table.

At the forum, African officials, while excited at the prospect of accessing the vast U.S. market, made it clear they are wary that they will end up losing in a free trade deal with the world's largest economy. In a speech to the forum, Senegalese Minister of Foreign Affairs Cheikh Tidiane Gaudio quoted President Abdoulaye Wade as saying, “Africa is ready for free trade, but we prefer fair trade above all.”

► **Emad Mekay** Washington

Pickups at Hotels and University accommodation to the SECC Thursday, June 22



Route One	SECC Transfers	07:30 various departures	Express (07:30) Premier George St (07:40) Premier Charing Cross (07:50) Ibis (08:00)	SECC (for 08:30)
Route Two	SECC Transfers	07:30 departure	Glasgow University, Queen Margaret Halls, Kirklee	SECC (for 08:30)
Route Three	SECC Transfers	07:30 departure	Strathclyde University (Anderson Campus)	SECC (for 08:30)
Route Four	SECC Transfers	07:30 various departures	Strathclyde University (Jordan Hill Campus) (07:30) Glasgow University, Wolfson Hall (07:45)	SECC (for 08:30)
	SECC to various Dine-Arounds	18:15 (single departure only)	SECC Car Park 1 to Dine-Arounds. All coaches will carry the name of the dine around on the front screen	Dine Arounds
	Dine-Arounds to Various hotel and University Accommodation	22:00 (single departure only)	Dine Arounds to Hotel and University Accommodation. All coaches will carry the name of your accommodation on the screen	Hotels/Campus