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THE CHANGING NATURE OF AID, PARTICULARLY HEALTH AID, FROM EUROPEAN NGOS

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As is well-known, the gap between the North and the South is becoming wider every day. The system that backs this conflict has a name: Imperialism. According to the latest UNDP report, the South loses some US\$ 500 billion each year to the North due to its unfavorable position on the World market, whereas the entire amount of aid from the North to the South is only one-tenth of this loss. But the most striking feature of today's imperialism is its ability to mask this reality by using the media and the 'communications revolution'. While the gap has become 30% wider over the last ten years, the concept of the contradiction between North and South is disappearing in image-building about Third World problems in northern countries. While northern transnationals and banks have expanded their control of the world economy by 50% over this same ten years, the words 'multinational' or 'transnational' have been disappearing in reports concerning the causes of the problems of the Third World. Even the famous United Nations Study Center on Transnational Corporations has been liquidated. Yet while the American CIA quadrupled its annual turnover during the Reagan years, the concept of the CIA has hardly been

mentioned in publications concerning war, health, or even military conflict in developing countries.

There is a gap developing between reality on the one hand, and the image-building about the Third World in our northern countries on the other. Only a few people in Europe realize that NGOs bear some responsibility for this phenomenon. In Europe there is a revival of a comprehensive ideology whose aim is to keep the North-South contradiction out of the picture. This ideology has a name: anti-tiersmondisme or anti-Third World solidarity. Anti-tiersmondisme has been developed by the French ultra-right think tank Liberte Sans Frontieres (Freedom Without Borders). LSF was founded by Medecin Sans Frontieres (Doctors without Borders) in 1985. Anti-tiersmondisme seeks to cover up North-South antagonism using two methods. Firstly, in relation to the problems of the Third World, they blame the victims, the Third World people themselves, by focusing on their behavior, on debt management, on ethnic wars (people killing themselves), and on corruption from oppressive rulers without making the link between the corruption, these dictators, and northern countries. Structural violence is neglected, while violence amongst people, which at first glance contains no structural relation to imperialism, will be dramatized. There is an emphasis on a hard-luck analysis, focusing on factors such as drought, climate, natural catastrophe, and helpless victims. Secondly, in relation to the solutions to Third World problems, they depend on a Eurocentric approach. The white doctor has to fly in a C-130 army airplane to the Third World catastrophe to save the black children who are the innocent helpless victims of the violence of their own people or leaders. That is the picture the public in Europe receives from this type of action.

This Eurocentric approach is evident in an important debate taking place in the European NGO world and in the United Nations Security Council. This debate centers around the so-called humanitarian right and duty to intervene. Intervention is envisaged from the northern side only, because of course they would not allow a country like Cuba to intervene in New York to establish medical services for the minorities who are in desperate need for health care, yet Cuba has proved able to develop health care

services for Third World situations such as that in which these American minorities are living. What is kept out of the picture of anti-tiersmondisme is the reason for Third World problems and the responsibility of northern imperialism, and the creativity, strength and capacity of Third World people to help themselves, and liberate themselves in a struggle for national democratic liberation.

The debate about the humanitarian duty to intervene is an important debate that is currently pushing certain European NGOs to act, in effect, as government organizations - organizations which tend to serve the geostrategic interests of their governments. The humanitarian duty to intervene arose during the events in Rumania at the end of 1989. Xavier Emmanuëll, a leader of Medecin Sans Frontieres in France, expressed in *Le Monde* on 4 April 1990 his indignation that Gorbachev did not intervene in Rumania to eliminate Ceaucescu, while the Americans had the courage to recognize their duty to intervene in Panama. The comparison between events in Rumania and Panama, both occurring at the end of 1989, shows how humanitarian organizations can be manipulated by the Western media.

For example, MSF Belgium had 550 special articles in the Belgian press about their activities in Rumania at that time, whereas the testimony of MSF doctors working in Palestine during the first two years of the Intifada received five lines in just one Belgian newspaper. While MSF was concentrating nearly all its efforts in Rumania, no interest whatsoever appeared to exist for humanitarian intervention in Panama. However, in terms of humanitarian need, the number of fatal casualties during the events in Rumania is estimated at a thousand, while the number of deaths caused by the American invasion of Panama has been estimated by Panamanian bishops and human rights organizations at between 4,000 and 7,000. The orchestrated mass graves of Timisoara were shown for hours on television in Europe, while real mass graves in Panama, only gradually revealed, were presented marginally in the news. US troops developed an ingenious strategy for covering up the human tragic aspects of the invasion in front of the entire world. Aid and human rights organizations in Panama were not allowed to get in touch with thousands of refugees.

Hardly any news of the events which occurred in Panama made its way into the European press. General Schwarzkopf, who later led the Gulf War, exercised this media manipulation during the greater part of the Panama invasion. The logic of the duty to intervene everywhere that so-called democracy, human rights, or international law are violated was further developed by Bush in his New World Order and applied on a larger scale during the Gulf War. The same logic was then used during the tragic situation of the Kurds in northern Iraq to create a pretext for American and European intervention. Attempts were made to legitimize the duty of intervention by the United Nations in order that this, and following interventions, could take place under the UN flag.

Using this recent idea of intervention on humanitarian grounds, is easier for imperialist powers to intervene when the policy of a Third World country does not serve their interests. The Americans, and also the Europeans, specialize in orchestrating civil wars, crises, and catastrophes in the Third World, in order to officially appropriate the right to intervene directly in a civil war, the foundation for which they have themselves created.

There are four mechanisms by which pressure is put on some European NGOs to become government organizations in the North: the question of neutrality; the role of the western media; money; and the question of the useful and useless, dangerous victims.

Firstly, the one who seeks to be apolitical turns to the right. There is a logical progression from so-called political neutrality to the ideology which dominates our society. This is proved by the history of MSF France, the organization which lies at the base of anti-tiersmondisme. Secondly, the western media are now functioning as the mouthpiece of the rich. Organizations such as MSF gain a great deal of media attention in a world where the media is falling more and more into the hands of imperialist pressure groups. Media-oriented organizations run the risk of letting themselves float on the wave of politics of those pressure groups. There is an old proverb which says that one goes where his bread is buttered.

MSF Belgium has become the largest NGO in Belgium. The majority of the money they receive comes from the EC's emergency assistance fund. This is a dangerous material basis which can turn an organization like MSF into the medical shock troops of the EC countries. Emergency aid is rarely ever disinterested, but rather serves directly the economic or strategic aims of the West. For example, in late 1990 the EC took an unprecedented decision to provide 40 billion Belgian Francs in aid to the Soviet Union to help during what was called the 'winter of hunger'. However, when Gorbachev's policy no longer coincided with EC directives, the winter of hunger apparently ceased to exist. All help was blocked, with the exception of some funds to Armenia and the Baltic States, which at that time opposed Gorbachev. MSF was instructed to send its humanitarian aid immediately to the opposing states so that everyone could see that the EC was organizing a purely humanitarian action.

The final point is that of useful and useless, dangerous victims. MSF concentrates its help on victims of war and disasters. MSF states that the international community should concentrate on intervening in these insane civil wars. We have just concluded the bloodiest and most violent of wars in terms of intensity of violence - the Gulf war - orchestrated and carried out under the flag of the international community. In addition, lying behind the vast majority of conflict in the Third World is the low-intensity conflict strategy. This is a coercive imperialist strategy based on the United States' humiliating lessons from Vietnam. It is not insignificant that this strategy is called the permanent World War III. As aid organizations are confronted with the direct misery of this conflict, we must be aware of the fact that, from the perspective of the imperialist, there are useful victims - presented by the media in great numbers to reinforce psychological warfare - and there are useless victims. Hundreds of thousands were killed by death squads in numerous Third World countries. Hundreds of thousands were direct or indirect victims of the bombardment on Iraq. Hundreds of thousand die due to IMF policy. UNICEF estimates that, on a yearly basis, five hundred thousand children die from the effects of the debt burden. But who is still talking about the 12 million street children in Brazil, where thousands of children die due to

privation? Or the genocide of the Indians of the Amazon forests caused by the multinationals who plunder these forests and their mineral resources? These victims are harmful to imperialism and are kept quiet and far from the media.

I would conclude with a plea for a conscious, anti-imperialist humanism, because those who are guided only by the dreadful feelings aroused by witnessing misery can serve as unintentional, useful tools for imperialist psychological warfare against the South. When one does not reveal the underlying mechanisms, the underlying opposition of interests, or inequalities and unjust practices, then one is helping to legitimize those responsible for the disasters and wars to which the people will be subjected in the New World Order. A consequent humanism requires an anti-imperialist stand, a political orientation on the side of the South, even if this stand goes against the worker who has to choose between working as a lackey or a liberator; northern NGOs cannot avoid having to take sides.

amniocentesis and ultrasound are being used to determine the sex of fetuses so that females can be aborted.

Priorities in health spending need to be reoriented. Budgets for primary health care and the treatment of our infectious diseases are being cut. Expenditure on research and development is largely diverted towards the diseases of the rich world, such as cancer, while only 1% of all research expenditure is allocated to the research of tropical diseases.

Environmental degradation is a major problem in Asia. In countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and India, people have had, for centuries, a special relationship with the forests, but now they are having to witness large-scale deforestation which is taking place in order to produce goods for countries like Japan. Large numbers of indigenous people are also being displaced by big development projects such as the Narmada Dam in India. This is a further example of the Western development model that is imposed on our people without consultation.

The GATT is currently a major area of concern for developing countries and one that has an impact on health. The GATT deals with a country's right to patent its indigenous biodiversity, such as plants and herbs that have therapeutic properties. Multi-national companies want the right to exploit our biodiversity and register the patent in their northern countries which will prevent us from using or selling such plants in the country where they actually grow! GATT also has the effect of preventing us from storing seed to use for a second year. India has its own Patent Act of 1970 that offers protection to local people but we are now under pressure from the US to change this act. The GATT, whose rules are undemocratically determined and then imposed on sovereign countries, will have such an impact that, in the future, its rules will determine what people can eat, drink, wear and think.

Such processes are taking place in the name of development. Asia is not only in the midst of trade and economic wars but is also in the midst of an identity crisis. In the past there was a sense of leadership in self-reliance. Mahatma Ghandi led the civil disobedience movement in Bihar, India

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when farmers were forced to grow Indigo. This movement proclaimed "we will grow food, not Indigo for Lancashire or Manchester". The whole of history is now repeating itself in the field of health.

Namibia is a vast country with a population of only 1.4 million. After years of colonial domination by Germany and South Africa, Namibia finally achieved independence in 1990.

Colonial occupation of Namibia has had a significant effect on the development of its health services. The colonial system was organized according to ethnic groups with the white minority being grossly favoured in health provision. Services were dominated by curative care rather than primary health care and there was a marked urban bias. As a result, people living in rural areas had limited access to modern health care and relied heavily on traditional healing.

A disproportionately high percentage of the population of Namibia suffer health problems that are related to the conflict that has ravaged the country in its recent history. Physical disability, depression, alcoholism and suicides are commonplace yet facilities for treatment, rehabilitation and counselling are limited. Since independence the new government has been trying to introduce primary health care/community-based health care. But the large-scale reorganization of health services is such a long process that few changes are yet evident. However, the government was quick to realize that NGOs had a significant role to play in developing the country's health system. The Namibia Development Trust (NDT) is an NGO aiming to promote the concept and use of primary health care. NDT has held workshops