

In the Aftermath of the South Asia Earthquake: Solidarity with the Peoples of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan

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We express our deep sympathy and solidarity with the people of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan hit by the 7.2-magnitude quake of October 8. The earthquake resulted in deaths already estimated at 75,000 - 80,000, and inflicted unimaginable damage to communities, livelihoods and the environment. Several thousands more have been injured, desperately awaiting relief, while many more are missing. Entire communities in remote areas have been cut off from relief efforts. Winter has set in, with falling temperatures and rains further endangering the wounded, the hungry and the homeless.

As the untold human, economic and social costs continue to rise for these three countries, we are reminded of the catastrophic tsunami nine months ago that struck developing countries in Asia. The impact of these tragedies on Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and other affected countries, will be felt for many years to come by their peoples who have not been able to benefit from effective disaster-preparedness systems, let alone deal with daily problems of economic survival.

While natural calamities can strike anywhere and hit anyone, it is clear that the vulnerabilities of people and communities are exacerbated a thousand fold by poverty, marginalization and deprivation. The human and social toll of these disasters, including those of Hurricane Katrina should not only underscore the urgency of mobilizing rescue and relief, but also stress the equally compelling challenge of changing political and economic structures and policies that disempower and exploit the great majority of humanity.

We reiterate the call for the total and unconditional cancellation of debts claimed from the South, and the end to unfair trade relations, the privatization of basic services, and other destructive policies of neoliberal globalization.

Lessons from the tsunami tragedy should serve to alert us to wolves in sheep's clothing. In contrast to the selfless generosity of many institutions and individuals the world over who commendably contributed to the relief efforts in an unprecedented _expression of solidarity, the G8 governments, the international financial institutions and global corporations used the tsunami relief and reconstruction efforts to expand their intervention in the affairs of the devastated countries and pursue their economic interests.

We are only too painfully aware that the international aid regime may tighten its grip further, as it did in the post-tsunami scenario, and extend new loans in the name of post-disaster rehabilitation. We should strongly and resolutely resist this.

We protest the continued prioritization of debt payments over urgent social services that include the development of community-based and managed disaster preparedness and coping mechanisms so

that deaths and damages could be minimized.

We join the call of our sisters and brothers in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan for support in this hour of great loss and suffering. We further pledge to work even harder so that the impact of natural calamities will no longer be magnified by poverty and marginalization, and can no longer be used as opportunities for exploitation.

No new debts in the guise of aid!

Immediate and unconditional cancellation of debts claimed from the South, starting with disaster and crisis-stricken countries!

JUBILEE SOUTH

Jubilee South - ASIA PACIFIC MOVEMENT ON DEBT AND DEVELOPMENT