

President Evo Morales of Bolivia did not mince words yesterday diagnosed the root cause of climate change as being capitalism and all that it entails. The president was speaking at the formal opening of the official opening of the first-ever World Peoples Climate Change Summit (CMPCC).

The Tiquipaya stadium, venue of the event, was filled to capacity with about 10,000 peoples from the nations and continents of the world. Many more milled the streets outside the stadium while thousands more kept to the queue at the town square waiting for accreditation to participate in the conference. Present on the platform with the president were the Vice President of Burundi, Ambassadors from various countries, representative of the UNFCCC secretariat and representatives of the peoples of the continents. 17 participants were expected at this conference but by the end of the second day up to 30,000 had registered.

The opening ceremony was colourful in the literal sense with multicoloured flags waving, music by musicians from various countries and rituals carried out by leaders of indigenous peoples of the Americas. There was also poetry (written and read by this writer. See end of this report).

To President Morales, the Copenhagen climate conference was not a failure but a victory. According to him, it was a failure of governments but a victory for the peoples of the world.

We are here today because the governments of the world could not reach an agreement in Copenhagen on cutting emissions and acting on climate change, he said. If they had reached a just agreement, this gathering would not have been necessary.

According to Morales, capitalism and its pursuit of profits and limitless extraction of resources in a finite world is hastening the disappearance of species, the rise of hunger, melting of glaciers and small island nations may disappear. He added that in the last 100 years, developed countries with 20% of the world's population have generated over 76% of carbon emissions responsible for climate change.

Capitalism merchandises everything. It seeks continual expansion. The system needs to be changed. We have to choose between change or death, President Morales warned, adding,

Capitalism is the number one enemy of mankind. He saw a sustainable future as being possible only through actions of solidarity and complementarities as well as equity and the respect of human rights, right to water and biodiversity the Rights of Mother Earth a new system of rights that abolishes all forms of colonialism.

President Morales condemned the erosion of sustainable and traditional ways of life, indigenous knowledge and wisdom. He also condemned the introduction of genetically engineered crops as well as heavy dependence on chemicals in agriculture.

The president said that the climate conference was called so that governments and peoples can sit together and fashion out ways to save the earth from climate change resulting from current destructive modes of production and consumption. To him, it is vital for governments to respect the views of social movements and peoples of the world. He called for the decolonisation of the atmosphere and a United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth. Such a charter will secure for the people of the world a right to freedom from fear of pollution as well as from fear of contamination of the food chain through genetic engineering.

President Morales called for the building of intercontinental movements, strengthening of international organisations and organisations of indigenous peoples and workers. He reminded the gathering that in recent times nature has been sending strong signals to the world through tsunamis, floods and earthquakes. In addition to these signals, climate change portends more dangers. Urgent action is needed.

In conclusion, the president called on the peoples of the world to act together to save Mother Earth from capitalism: There are two options before us all, two ways that we must choose from: death to capitalism or death to Mother Earth.

Speaking later in the day on a panel that examined the structural causes of climate change, Alvaro Garcia Linera, the Vice President of Bolivia, further explained the concept of Mother Earth. We note here that President Morales attended this session held at the Coliseo of the Univalle and sat among the participants. (That in itself constitutes a message to leaders who need to know that they need to listen and hear what the people are saying.)

The concept of Mother Earth is not just a slogan. It means a new way of producing, a new way of relationship with nature and with one another, he said. This relationship is one of equality and not domination, a relationship of dialogue, of giving and receiving. It is not merely a philosophy or folklore. It is a new ethics, a new way of developing technologies and modes of production.

Recalling a statement by Rosa Luxemburg, socialism or barbarism, Vice President Linera said that today we could say Mother Earth or barbarism.

Affirming that capitalism was the root cause of climate change and many of the ills of the world today, Linera said that the system permits oil companies and the military complex to commit genocide, destroy the environment and reap ever-rising profits at the expense of the blood of the people.

Nothing will change as long as capitalism reigns, he warned. It is a system that destroys society and nature through the destruction of knowledge and positive productive forces. It is a system without conscience.

Vice President Linera called for the rebuilding of our collective environmental and social consciousness. He also called for the building of an organic relationship with nature where human beings understand that nature has rights and human beings have obligations towards nature.

In an oblique reference to carbon offsets and REDD projects, Linera warned, We are not forest rangers for those causing pollutions and climate change. This system of indulgences cannot be accepted. It is a system of colonialism. It is not a solution.

Speaking also on the structural causes of climate change, Maria Espinosa, a minister from Ecuador, said that climate change must not be used as a smokescreen to obscure other problems confronting the world today, including the lingering impacts of the structural adjustment programmes foisted on developing nations by the World Bank and the IMF in the 1980s.

Espinosa informed participants that owing to Ecuador's refusal to associate with the Copenhagen Accord drawn up by a few countries during COP15, the United States of America government has refused Ecuador an environmental aid of \$2.5 million. In response, Ecuador has offered to pay the USA \$2.5 million if they sign the Kyoto Protocol.

She also spoke on the Ecuadorian initiative to disallow the exploitation of crude oil in the Yasuni Park, a biodiversity hotspot and home to indigenous peoples. This move will keep 400 million metric tonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere thus offering a real solution to climate change.

Earlier this writer, while speaking on the same panel, had said that the real solution to climate change is the cutting of emissions at source and that rather than waste resources on untested technologies such as those of carbon capture and storage and geo-engineering, the world should quickly move away from the fossil fuels driven civilization. This call is captured in the well-known slogan: leave the oil in the soil, the coal in the hole and the tar sands in the land.

We also stated that the equation of energy security to national security has led some nations into military adventures which apart from being destructive in themselves consume huge fossil fuels and compound the problems of climate change. We also rejected the neoliberal systems that permit the World Bank to parade itself as a climate bank while funding dirty energy projects such as the Eskom coal plant in South Africa and a number of other fossil fuels projects elsewhere. We called for the overturning of corporate power and halting its erosion of peoples sovereignty.

Transformation solutions offered included:

- Reclaiming peoples control over their resources
  - Building progressive people-oriented governments and power structures and shifting away from capitalist modes of relations
  - Direct action to stem climate crimes at source
  - Legislation such as the Rights of Mother Earth
  - Litigation and other actions that connect civil society actions in the North and the South.
  - Example the prosecution of Shell in the Netherlands over pollution in Nigeria.
  - Leave fossil fuels in the soil
  - Reject the Copenhagen Accord
- The working groups continued their work throughout yesterday and many other panels with enthusiastic participation.

