The Bamako Appeal
50 Years after the Bandung Conference
Rémy Herrera

Calling for a new Bandung of the peoples of the South, the Bamako Appeal was written on January 18, 2006, in the capital of Mali, thanks to the initiative of a group of organisations that included the Third World Forum, the Forum for Another Mali, and the World Forum of Alternatives. It was adopted some days later in Caracas by the Assembly of the Social Movements of the World Social Forum, and was included in the documents elaborating the principles and guidelines of the collective actions of the Assembly. The Appeal is designed not only to be read, discussed, enriched and diffused, but also to be signed by individuals and institutions. Already many different organisations have decided to approve it; these include the International Action Center (United States), Alternatives (Russia), the Alternative Information Center (Israel), Resistir.info (Portugal), Cestes (Italia), the IBON Foundation (Philippines), and in Brazil, the MST, the PCdoB, the CUT and the Union of NGOs among others. The full text is available in several languages, including Asiatic ones, on a number of websites - see, for example, the Third World Forum’s website at http://forumtiersmonde.net.

The solidarity of all peoples – of the South and of the North – in the construction of a universal civilisation cannot be founded on the illusory notion that it is possible to simply ignore the conflicts of interest separating different classes and nations. Genuine solidarity must transcend the antagonisms inherent in capitalism and imperialism. The regional organisations behind the alternative globalisation movement must seek to strengthen the autonomy and solidarity of nations and of peoples on the five continents. It is a perspective that contradicts that of the present dominant model of regionalisation, which consists of mere building blocks of neo-liberal globalisation. The Bamako Appeal calls for a Bandung of the people who are victims of capitalism, and the rebuilding of a peoples’ front of the South capable of holding in check both the imperialism of the dominant economic powers and U.S. military hegemony. Such an anti-imperialist front would not put the peoples of the South in opposition to those of the North. On the contrary, it would constitute the basis for a global internationalism, bringing them all together in the building of a common civilisation in all its diversity.

The Bamako Appeal is the product of a collective effort, realised in close interaction with social movements from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the North, especially Europe. The work was conducted by a group of about one hundred activist members of these movements, gathered together on the eve of the opening of the session of the polycentric World Social Forum in Bamako to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Bandung conference. The
anti-imperialist day organised on January 18 was for them an appeal for the rebuilding of the Tricontinental alliance between Asia, Africa and Latin America, and the rebirth of international solidarity between the peoples of the South and the workers of the North.

The principles of the Bamako Appeal are the following:

A. Construct a world founded on the solidarity of human beings and peoples;
B. Construct a world founded on the full affirmation of citizenship and equality of the sexes;
C. Construct a universal civilisation offering the full potential of creative development in all areas and to all its diverse members;
D. Construct socialisation through democracy;
E. Construct a world founded on the recognition of the non-market-driven laws of nature and of the resources of the planet and its agricultural soil;
F. Construct a world founded on the recognition of the non-market-driven status of cultural products and scientific acquisitions, of education, and of health care;
G. Promote policies that associate democracy with social progress and the affirmation of autonomy of nations and peoples;
H. Affirm the solidarity of the people of the North and the South in the construction of an internationalism (meaning international solidarity between workers and peoples) on an anti-imperialist basis.

More than five years of worldwide gatherings of people and organisations who oppose neo-liberalism have provided an experience leading to the creation of a new collective conscience. The social forums and the Assembly of Social Movements have been the main architects of this conscience. Meeting in Bamako on Jan. 18, 2006 on the eve of the opening of the polycentric World Social Forum, the participants in the gathering dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the Bandung Conference expressed the need to define alternative goals of development; to create a balance of societies; to abolish exploitation by class, gender, race and caste; and to mark out a route to new relationships between forces of the North and South.

The Bamako Appeal aims to contribute to the emergence of a new popular and historical subject, and to consolidate the gains made at these meetings. It seeks to advance the principle of the right to an equitable existence for everyone; to affirm a collective life of peace, justice and diversity; and to promote the means for all humanity to reach these goals at local level. In order that an historical subject – one that is diverse, multipolar and from the people – come into existence, it is necessary to define and promote alternatives capable of mobilising social and political forces. The goal is a radical transformation of the capitalist system. The destruction of the planet and of millions of human beings, the individualist and consumerist culture that nourishes this system, along with its imposition by imperialist
powers are no longer tolerable, since the existence of humanity itself is at stake. Alternatives to the wastefulness and destructiveness of capitalism draw their strength from a long tradition of popular resistance – a resistance that also embraces all of the short forward steps that are indispensable to the daily life of the system’s victims.

The Appeal expresses the commitment to: (i) construct an internationalism joining the peoples of the South and the North who suffer the ravages engendered by the dictatorship of financial markets and by the uncontrolled global deployment of transnational firms; (ii) construct the solidarity of the peoples of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas who are confronted with challenges of development in the 21st century; and (iii) construct a political, economic and cultural consensus that is an alternative to militarised and neo-liberal globalisation and to the hegemony of the United States and its allies. In order to progress from a collective conscience to the building of collective, popular, plural and multipolar actors, it is necessary to formulate strategies and concrete proposals around precise themes. The themes of the Appeal deal with the following 10 fields, and include both long-term goals and proposals for immediate action: the political organisation of globalisation; the economic organisation of the world system; the future of peasant societies; the building of a workers’ united front; regionalisation for the benefit of the peoples; the democratic management of societies; gender equality; the sustainable management of the resources of the planet; the democratic management of the media and cultural diversity; and democratisation of international organisations.

The Bamako Appeal is an invitation to all the struggle organisations that represent the working classes of the globe (who comprise the vast majorities), to all those excluded from the neo-liberal capitalist system, and to all people and political forces who support these principles, to work together in order to put into effect the new collective conscience as an alternative to the present system of inequality and destruction.

On January 18, 2005, the World Forum of Alternatives team coordinated the activities of the groups that were invited to formulate proposals for concrete alternatives around the following ten strategic priorities for action:

(1) For a multipolar world system founded on peace, law, and negotiation, with priority calls for the prohibition of the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons and the destruction of all existing arsenals; for the dismantling of all the military bases outside of national territory, in particular the base in Guantánamo (US-occupied Cuba); and for the immediate closing of all CIA-run prisons. In order to imagine a multipolar world system which rejects the US military control of the planet and guarantees the whole gamut of rights for politically active citizens, allowing people to control their destinies, it is necessary to reinforce the movement protesting against war and military occupations and to promote solidarity with people engaged in resistance around the world. It includes those protesting against the war in Iraq, against the
military presence in Afghanistan, and against any intervention by NATO outside Europe. It also includes reaffirmation of solidarity with the people of Palestine, Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia.

(2) For an economic reorganisation of the global system, defining actions to reinforce the protest campaigns against the current rules of operation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO); to define alternate rules (for the removal of the WTO from agriculture, services, intellectual property, etc.); to organise the control of the transfer of capital and technology as well as the control of the flow of capital (in particular speculative capital); to suppress tax havens; to construct regional systems of management of stock exchanges and their connection to a renovated world system (calling into question the role of the IMF and the World Bank, returning to the principle of the rule of national laws to define the local economic system, overcoming the obstacles imposed by the unnegotiated decisions of international organisation, etc.); and to reinforce the mobilisation to promote audits allowing people to get the right to identify and to cancel unilaterally illegitimate debts.

(3) For regional structures that serve the people and reinforce the South in global negotiations, supporting struggles against bilateral free trade agreements, and in particular against the Free Trade Area of the Americas (ALCA), while supporting, among others, the struggles in favour of the ALBA or Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and the Caribbean. Recognising that free trade, while supporting the strongest countries and transnational monopolies, is the enemy of genuine regional integration and that the latter cannot be carried out on the basis of free trade, it is necessary to create the conditions for an alternative means of co-operation within each major geographical area (like a revival of the Tricontinental in the spirit of Bandung), working in close collaboration with the social movements. In Asia, popular initiatives to confront neo-liberal globalisation and to bring about another form of regional integration have already brought together a number of civil society organisations and lead to the development of a popular charter aiming to reinforce co-operation in trade. In addition to the campaigns against wars and the threats of wars, it is important in the Asian context to note efforts to thwart the expansion of financial capital and the neo-liberal competition for it among countries; to reinforce solidarity between working classes of the various countries; and to promote local cycles of production and consumption, and rural reconstruction.

(4) For the democratic management of the planet’s natural resources, recommending, among other actions, to constitute an international court charged with considering ecological crimes (the countries of North and their local clients could then be compelled to pay reparations or ecological debts to the countries of the South); to prohibit any illegal and/or amoral contracts that force farmers to be dependent on the suppliers of seeds (a situation that leads to technological slavery and the destruction of biodiversity); to abolish “pollution
rights” and their sale and purchase, and to oblige rich countries to decrease their production rate of carbon dioxide to allow poor countries to industrialise; to prohibit the building of dams, unless they are really necessary, and to ensure compensation is paid to displaced people when dams are reconstructed; to protect living and genetic resources from being patented by the North, since the practice impoverishes the countries of the South; to fight against the privatisation of water as promoted by the World Bank, even in the form of private-public partnerships (PPP), and to guarantee a quantity of water per person while respecting the renewal of ground water.

(5) For a better future for peasant farmers, with organised actions proposed: to prevent the Doha Round and the Economic Partnership Agreement; to get agriculture away from WTO control by entrusting the international regulation of agricultural trade to an institution of the United Nations, possibly the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO); to assure food sovereignty by granting to each national state or group of states the right to define its internal agricultural policy and the type of connection it wishes to have with the world market, to protect itself effectively from imports, and to subsidise its farmers; to guarantee access for peasant producers to the productive resources, and in particular land (this is a basic right that requires reform of land systems and agrarian policies); and to apply price policies aimed at avoiding the destruction of peasant communities.

(6) To build a worker’s united worldwide front, with the following proposals: a willingness amongst trade unions to collaborate with social movements without trying to subordinate them to the traditional trade union structure or to a specific political agenda; the constitution of transnational trade union structures in order to confront transnational employers; the promotion of gradual improvements in wages and working conditions, in order to expand local production in line with local demand, and of a system of negotiation to carry out relocation of factories in ways other than following the logic of profit; the consideration of the rights of migrant worker as a basic concern for trade unions, with the assurance that solidarity among workers is not dependent on their national origin; the building of the future transnational organisation of the laboring class, not as a unique, hierarchical structure, but as a variety of types of organisations with a network-like structure; a labor front with reorganised structures that include workers outside the formal sector, capable of taking coordinated actions to confront globalised capitalism. Such a renewed, worldwide and inclusive movement of workers, acting together with other social movements, will be able to create a world order founded on solidarity rather than on competition.

(7) For a democratisation of societies as a necessary step to full human development, in its multidimensional aspects from the enterprise level to the worldwide scale, inseparable from the social progress, and articulating its local, national, regional and international levels. Progressive forces must re-appropriate the concept of democracy, because an alternative,
socialist society must be fully democratic. Democracy does not come from on high; it is a process of cultural transformation, as people change through their practice. Thus, it is essential that activists in popular movements and in left wing or progressive governments understand the necessity to create spaces for real participation both in workplaces and in neighborhoods. Without the transformation of people into protagonists of their history, the problems of the people – health, food, education, housing, etc. – cannot be solved. The struggle for democracy must also be linked to the struggle to eradicate poverty and all forms of exclusion. It is no longer enough to just assert the need for an alternative society; it is necessary to propose popular initiatives which are alternatives to capitalism and which aim to break the logic of commerce and the relations that this dynamic imposes.

(8) For the eradication of all forms of oppression, exploitation, and alienation of women, in order: to break with the practice of sidelining the problems facing women; to reinforce the alliance between feminist organisations and progressive forces in order to ensure a pro-women agenda (challenging the image of their inferior position in society, developing education programmes for women, spreading a better consciousness of women’s active roles, reinforcing legal provisions for an effective equality between the genders, and increasing women’s equal representation in institutions); to acknowledge the history of women, and their individual and collective actions; to promote the basic right of women to control their bodies, brains, and decisions relating to their life choices; to support theoretical reflection starting from feminine experiences in order to counter male domination.

(9) For the democratic management of the media and cultural diversity, underlying the fundamental importance of the rights to education and the right to communicate, of the struggle against monopolisation of images and information, and of the diffusion of non-dominant languages. Before the rights to culture, to information and to inform are addressed, the problem of the right to education, which is denied in many countries (particularly for girls), needs to be solved. Campaigns could be launched to promote legislative initiatives aimed at fighting media concentration and guaranteeing the autonomy of editors, to promote education programmes that encourage criticism of the media in the school system and popular organisations, and to support the alternative media. Furthermore, the right to express oneself in one’s own language means that education systems should teach languages other than English.

(10) For the democratisation of international organisations and the institutionalisation of a multipolar international order. The United Nations is a peoples’ institution, and for this reason represents a step forward. But it also reflects the balance of power among national states; for certain peoples and in certain circumstances, impact can prove to be ambivalent. Changes in the UN are thus necessary, insofar as the hegemony of the most powerful countries enables them to use the UN for their own purposes. We propose the following initiatives: democratise
the area referred to as the UN; initiate “reforms” of the UN with a goal of limiting the inequalities of the balance of power among national states; act on the governments which constitute the UN by creating within each country an observer group that permits an explanation and justification of the action of the governments within the UN, its specialised organizations, and the authorities created by the Bretton Woods meeting (the IMF, the World Bank, WTO); refinance the specialised organisations such as the FAO or the WHO to avoid their dependence upon transnational corporations; ensure a wide, effective presence of social movements and NGOs within the international institutions; promote International Courts of Justice (in particular concerning the economic crimes) while preventing them from being manipulated by the dominant powers, and constitute courts of popular opinion to promote alternative means of establishing justice; democratise the United Nations, increase the power of the General Assembly and democratise the Security Council in order to break the monopolies (right of veto, atomic powers); promote a UN that allows for regionalisation that is equipped with real powers. It is proposed to promote a Middle East Social Forum, gathering the progressive forces of the countries of the area to seek solutions, instead of relying on the US project of the Greater Middle East; promote inside the UN respect for the sovereignty of national states; promote a world Parliament of the Peoples to bring humanity out of the vicious circle of poverty.

This Bamako Appeal for solidarity between peoples for the defence of humanity in the face of capitalist and imperialist barbarism was launched from Bamako, and this is very good news for the true friends of Africa, be they from Asia, Latin America or Europe. Only by building synergies and solidarity beyond geographical and regional borders is it possible to find methods of action that could lead to real alternatives in this globalised world. Working groups will continue to discuss and work towards implementation of the topics addressed, and will propose strategic priorities for action, up until the next World Social Forum in Nairobi in 2007.

Endnotes

1 The Third World Forum, located in Dakar (Senegal), and whose director is Samir Amin, is a framework to find solutions to underdevelopment of the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The Forum for an Other Mali gathers together associations and social movements from Mali. The World Forum for Alternatives, whose president is Samir Amin, executive secretary François Houtart and coordinator Remy Herrera, is a network of institutions and researchers working together to provide proposals of alternative theories and actions to fight against neo-liberalism.

2 A major lesson of the ministerial Conference of the WTO in Hong Kong was that the governments of Brazil and India, and with them G-20, abandoned the interests of the populations of the Third World and appeared the most determined promoters of neo-liberal globalisation.