

THIRD WORLD

RESURGENCE

ISSUE No. 286

KDN PP6738/01/2013 (031741)

www.twn.my

Antibiotic resistance, corporate influence dominate World Health Assembly debate



Big
Pharma



ISSN 0128-357X



9 770128 357003

Editor's Note

OVER the years the annual ministerial assembly of the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been a valuable platform for member nations, civil society and health experts to discuss and debate global health issues. The 67th World Health Assembly which took place in Geneva in May was no exception. Among the important issues deliberated were the serious problems of antibiotic resistance and corporate influence in the operations and decisions of this United Nations body.

Although the world has been aware of the serious implications of antibiotic resistance for many years, it has yet to come to grips with the problem. The principal cause of antibiotic resistance is the misuse and overuse of existing antibiotics, and we have been aware of this danger since at least 1945 when Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin, sounded the warning against such resistance in his Nobel Lecture. For this state of affairs, pharmaceutical and corporate interests, with a big part of the medical establishment, are mainly to blame as they have been recklessly promoting the use and misuse of antibiotics. In their quest for profits, they have been prepared to sacrifice the long-term welfare of humankind.

Here it must be borne in mind that such profligacy is not confined to human beings. In fact, the problem of overuse is more acute in animals. In the US, for example, some 80% of the total antibiotics produced are fed to animals as a standard practice of animal agriculture. Given this reckless, extravagant use of antibiotics, it is not surprising that many species of infectious bacteria have evolved drug resistance.

It is important to be clear as to the full dimensions of this crisis and why there cannot be room for any more complacency. As a recent *Guardian* report noted, the pharmaceutical industry has produced three generations of antibiotics in the past 60 years. Microbes are now developing resistance even to the third generation of these drugs.

In the light of this, WHO is fully justified in raising the alarm about the chilling implications of this development in its comprehensive report on antibiotic resistance which it presented at the Assembly. In his foreword to the report, Keiji Fukuda, WHO's Assistant Director-General for Health Security, raises the spectre of 'a post-antibiotic era'. 'A post-antibiotic era – in which common infections and minor injuries can kill – far from being an apocalyptic fantasy, is instead a very real possibility for the 21st century,' he warns.

The WHO report is commendable not only for the warning it sounds but also for its presentation of the fullest picture yet of the magnitude of the 'antimicrobial resistance' (AMR) crisis. It is abundantly clear from this that AMR is spreading like a plague through the developing world and that it poses a far greater threat to the poorer countries than the rich ones. The World Health Assembly resolution on AMR adopted in May gives the green light to WHO to develop within a year a global action plan to mitigate AMR. This cannot come soon enough.

In any such plan, stricter regulation of the use of antibiotics must be a central plank. It must also address the issue of the current method of animal farming which is a principal cause of AMR. Given the dire state of the crisis, it cannot avoid focusing also on the problem of developing more potent and effective antibiotics to tackle the crisis.

Here it is necessary to face up to the fact that the record of the private sector in the development of antibiotics has been anything but impressive. As noted above, over a period of 60 years, the pharmaceutical industry has only produced three generations of antibiotics. The principal reason is one of profitability, but it is difficult to see what further incentives can be given to the private sector to get a move on.

The answer surely lies in states stepping up to the plate through publicly funded national research institutes to develop such antibiotics. Contrary to the myth that the private sector has been in the forefront of scientific research, it is states which historically played a leading role. The WHO plan of action should recommend that states take on this role as it would also ensure that the new antibiotics are affordable and accessible, especially for developing countries.

In addition to the issue of AMR, the 67th World Health Assembly was also notable for its success in resisting corporate attempts to use WHO to serve their commercial interests. The issue in question was a move by the pharmaceutical industries of Europe, Japan and the US to secure the adoption by WHO of industry-led standards which would in effect shield the interests of these corporations from competition by generic drug industries. A resolution to adopt such a regulatory system was, thanks to the opposition of a number of developing countries, duly amended to remove the bias in favour of these interests.

Although this particular move was rebuffed, it would be foolish to imagine that corporations will be dissuaded from attempting to influence WHO's agenda. WHO has always been plagued by such attempts and it is essential for civil society groups to keep a vigilant eye to prevent the subversion of this UN agency's role in promoting global public health.

In our cover story for this issue, we focus on the proceedings of the 67th World Health Assembly with regard to these two important issues. While reporting on the views of member states, we have also highlighted the invaluable work of civil society organisations in ensuring that WHO does not deviate from its mandate. In this connection, we reproduce the protest statement by these organisations over the invitation extended by WHO to Melinda Gates to be the keynote speaker for the Assembly, as emblematic of these concerns.

— *The Editors*

Visit the Third World Network website at: www.twn.my

Third World
RESURGENCE

www.twn.my

No 286 June 14 ISSN 0128-357X



A patient suffering from extreme drug-resistant tuberculosis awaits treatment at hospital. The problem of antibiotic resistance was one of the main themes addressed at this year's World Health Assembly.

7

ECOLOGY

- 2 Honduras: 'We came back to struggle' – *Sandra Cuffe*

HEALTH & SAFETY

- 4 In developing world, pollution kills more than disease – *Stephen Leahy*

ECONOMICS

- 5 Despite crisis, Europe continues to protect its bankers – *Julio Godoy*

COVER

Antibiotic resistance, corporate influence dominate World Health Assembly debate

- 7 Time to act! – *Shila Kaur*

- 10 CSOs call for global action to tackle antimicrobial resistance – *Kanaga Raja*
14 New momentum to act against antibiotic resistance – *Mirza Alas and Chee Yoke Ling*
18 Big Pharma fails in bid to influence WHO regulatory norms on medical products – *KM Gopakumar*
23 WHO and the Gates Foundation: Civil society groups register concern

WORLD AFFAIRS

- 25 South's leaders mark 50 years of G77 – *Martin Khor*
27 The revival of the movement of non-aligned countries – *Samir Amin*
29 The seismic shifts behind the coup in Thailand – *Grant Evans*

- 33 Egypt: Sisiphus – *Andrea Teti, Vivienne Matthies-Boon and Gennaro Gervasio*

HUMAN RIGHTS

- 37 Nobel laureates slam HRW ties to US government

WOMEN

- 38 First decolonisation, now 'depatriarchalisation' – *Lakshmi Puri*

VIEWPOINT

- 40 A dark heritage – *Jeremy Seabrook*
42 A level playing field? – *Mike Marqusee*

POETRY

- 44 For I am a stranger – *Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab*

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published by the Third World Network, an international network of groups and individuals involved in efforts to bring about a greater articulation of the needs and rights of peoples in the Third World; a fair distribution of world resources; and forms of development which are ecologically sustainable and fulfil human needs.

THIRD WORLD RESURGENCE is published monthly by Third World Network, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728 Fax: 60-4-2264505. Email: twnet@po.jaring.my
Printed by Jutaprint, No. 2, Solok Sungai Pinang 3, 11600 Penang, Malaysia.
Cover Design: Lim Jee Yuan
Main cover photo: WHO/Violaine Martin
Copyright © Third World Network

Publisher and Chief Editor: S.M. Mohamed Idris; **Managing Editor:** Chee Yoke Ling; **Editors:** T Rajamoorthy, Lean Ka-Min, Evelyne Hong; **Contributing Editors:** Roberto Bissio (Uruguay), Charles Abugre (Ghana); **Staff:** Linda Ooi (Design), Lim Jee Yuan (Art Consultant), Lim Beng Tuan (Marketing), Yap Bing Nyi (Editorial)

'We came back to struggle'

Indigenous communities in Honduras are fighting against new mining projects.

Sandra Cuffe reports.

THE dirt road winds its way up into the mountains of Yoro, dropping down to cross the Locomapa River at several points along the way. It's March, nearing the end of the dry season in this part of Honduras, and the pink blossoms of carao trees stand out against the dusty landscape of corn fields and coniferous forest.

Near the river, in the community of San Francisco Campo, Celso Alberto Cabrera sits outside his simple wooden home. It is here that indigenous Tolupan members of the San Francisco de Locomapa tribe maintained a 13-day road blockade in August 2013 to protest antimony mining in the tribe's territory. And it is here that three Tolupan blockade participants were murdered on 25 August. Cabrera's 71-year-old mother, María Enriqueta Matute, was shot and killed in her kitchen. Armando Fúnez Medina and Ricardo Soto Fúnez were shot on the dirt patio outside the house, next to the road that runs through the middle of town.

'They died because they were involved with the resistance,' Cabrera said. The blockade ended with the murders and, that same day, Cabrera and seven other community leaders fled the region due to death threats. An arrest warrant issued for the two murder suspects hasn't been carried out, but after the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights ordered precautionary measures for 38 people from the region, Cabrera and six others returned to Locomapa in February.

In theory, tribal policies mandate that no resource extraction can take place in the tribe's territory without the approval of the tribal assembly, in which a majority of the tribe's 900-plus members must be present to make decisions. No such authorisation has occurred. 'If the communities say no to mining, then that must be respected,' said Ramón Matute,



A wake for three indigenous Tolupan activists who were shot for protesting unauthorised mining in the tribe's territory. Indigenous communities throughout Honduras are speaking out against destructive mining practices.

who spent six months in exile due to his leadership in the struggle against mining.

Extractive projects are moving forward at an ever-increasing pace across Honduras, as the government tries to stay afloat by putting natural resources on the auction block. A combination of militarisation and the lack of proper consultation – let alone free, prior and informed consent from local communities – is causing conflict and resistance in indigenous territories.

'We're up against powerful interests,' Bertha Cáceres, general coordinator of the Civic Council of Popular and Indigenous Organisations of Honduras, said of the struggles against extractive and energy projects throughout the country. It's not only mining that worries her, but also hydroelectric dam construction, logging and oil exploration. 'Our concern is that all of the territories could end up in the hands of transnational corporations,' she said.

In the five years since the June 2009 coup that ousted President Manuel Zelaya, the Honduran government has issued an unprecedented

number of natural resource concessions. National and international energy corporations now hold rights to dozens of rivers, including waterways on which indigenous Tolupan, Lenca and Garifuna communities depend. In March, British multinational BG Group began offshore oil and gas exploration in a 13,500-square-mile area off the coast of the remote Moskitia region, and Chevron has expressed interest in the area. Mining activities are expanding, and mining interests are exploring the mineral potential of 950 sites throughout the country.

Honduras is a signatory to the International Labour Organisation Convention No. 169 on the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, as well as a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Yet the government's obligations under these international agreements have not been adopted into national legislation. At the same time, legislative initiatives such as the 2011 Investment Promotion and Protection Law have strengthened the legal protections for private investment.

'Never before in all the history

of Honduras has there been a greater push by the state to guarantee foreign investment,' said Miriam Miranda, general coordinator of OFRANEH, a federation representing the 46 Afro-indigenous Garifuna communities spread out along the Caribbean coast. The Honduran government is increasingly focused on natural resource exploitation, particularly mining, as a solution to its crippling debt. 'The greater the economic crisis of the state, the greater the crisis for indigenous peoples as well because the resources in our territories are placed at much greater risk,' Miranda said.

A new General Mining Law, passed in January 2013, opened the floodgates for mining around the country. The law put an end to a moratorium on mining concessions in place since 2006. Less than a week before the National Congress ratified regulations defining how the new mining law would be enacted, the Honduran government announced that 280 new mining concessions were in the works.

North American and European companies are currently operating four large-scale metallic mines in Honduras that produce gold, silver, zinc, lead and iron. The extraction of iron oxide for export to China is expanding at a rapid pace, and new metallic and non-metallic mining plans are underway.

The environmental and social impacts from the now closed San Martin gold mine in the Siria Valley, less than 100 miles from Locomapa, have been the centre of mining resistance. 'We've heard and seen that mining in the Siria Valley left behind destruction, left behind illnesses,' Ramón Matute said. Siria Valley residents have carefully documented and shared with communities throughout Central America their experience with community displacement, contamination and depletion of water sources, and health problems in the region affected by Goldcorp's open pit mine.

Tolupan activists don't have to look far for positive inspiration, either. Fifty miles west of Locomapa, thousands of residents of the municipi-



A goldmine in Honduras. The Honduran government is increasingly focused on natural resource exploitation, particularly mining, as a solution to its crippling debt.

ality of El Negrito took to the streets on 28 March to protest gold and coal mining concessions. During a packed town hall meeting, municipal authorities backed the communities' decision to ban all mining in the municipality.

More often, however, the official response to community struggles for their lands and resources is militarisation, criminalisation and repression. For example, when residents in Santa Barbara in western Honduras took to the streets on 24 March to protest mining, the Honduran government sent in the military police to evict their road blockade. Under the 2013 mining law, a percentage of mining royalties is paid directly into a security fund that finances the military police and other recently created security forces.

In Tolupan territory the resistance movement continues despite the 2013 murders and ongoing threats. Since Matute and other community leaders returned home to Locomapa and reunited with those who stayed behind, they have been busy organising. 'We didn't come here to stay hidden in our houses. We came back to continue the struggle,' said Matute, secretary of the grassroots tribal Preventative Council, which was organised in the 1990s to defend natural resources from unrestrained exploitation.

José María Pineda hasn't returned to Locomapa since August 2013. One of the most visible community leaders speaking out against resource extraction in Tolupan territory, Pineda

has been the main target of death threats. But his time away from home hasn't been wasted. He has travelled as far as Washington, DC to denounce human rights violations to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. For Pineda, the issue comes down to consultation and consent. 'So long as that doesn't happen, we're right to oppose the continuing extraction of the riches of our indigenous tribes in the municipality of Yoro,' he told *Earth Island Journal* in an interview in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital.

Back in Locomapa, the sweet aroma of ocote pine lingers in the air as the sun begins its descent behind the mountains. Sitting outside the house where his mother was killed, Celso Alberto Cabrera plays with his granddaughter. 'My mother died defending a right, and we have to do the same because we're thinking of the children who will be around after we're gone,' he said.

Cabrera takes comfort in the fact that communities throughout Honduras are speaking out against destructive mining practices. 'We feel it gives us great strength because we know that it's not just us, that there are other organisations that are fighting this same battle,' he said. 'We know that if at a certain point all of us in this struggle shout together, we will be heard.'

Sandra Cuffe is a freelance journalist currently based in Central America. This article is reproduced from Earth Island Journal (Summer 2014).

In developing world, pollution kills more than disease

Pollution is often misrepresented as a minor issue when in reality it is the biggest killer in the developing world.

POLLUTION, not disease, is the biggest killer in the developing world, taking the lives of more than 8.4 million people each year, a new analysis shows. That's almost three times the deaths caused by malaria and 14 times those caused by HIV/AIDS. However, pollution receives a fraction of the interest from the global community.

'Toxic sites along with air and water pollution impose a tremendous burden on the health systems of developing countries,' said Richard Fuller, president of the Pure Earth/Blacksmith Institute, which prepared the analysis as part of the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution (GAHP). GAHP is a collaborative body of bilateral, multilateral and international agencies, national governments, academia and civil society.

Air and chemical pollution is growing rapidly in these regions and when the total impact on the health of people is also considered, 'the consequences are dire', Fuller told Inter Press Service (IPS).

This future is entirely preventable as most developed countries have largely solved their pollution problems. The rest of the world needs assistance, but pollution has dropped off the radar in the current draft of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he said.

The SDGs are the UN's new plan for development assistance for the next 15 years. Countries, aid agencies and international donors are expected to align their funding and aid with these goals when they are announced in September 2015.

'Pollution is sometimes called the invisible killer ... its impact is difficult to track because health statistics measure disease, not pollution,' Fuller said.

Stephen Leahy

As a result pollution is often misrepresented as a minor issue, when it actually needs serious action now, he said.

The GAHP analysis integrates new data from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and others to determine that 7.4 million deaths were due to pollution sources from air, water, sanitation and hygiene. An additional one million deaths were due to toxic chemical and industrial wastes flowing into air, water, soil and food, from small and medium-sized producers in poor countries.

The health burden of environmental pollution in these countries is on top of health impacts from infectious diseases and smoking, said Jack Caravanos, professor of environmental health at the City University of New York and a technical adviser to the Blacksmith Institute.

It's extremely difficult to estimate the health impacts from many thousands of toxic sites contaminated with lead, mercury, hexavalent chromium and obsolete pesticides, Caravanos told IPS.

But the one-million death estimate is likely a gross underestimate since investigations into the scope of the problem have only just started. 'We've recently found sites filled with obsolete pesticides in Eastern Europe that have some very toxic chemicals,' he said.

These chemicals don't stay put. Rain washes them into soils and waterways, and wind blows toxic particles long distances, sometimes coating crops and food, Caravanos said. A 2012 study by Blacksmith estimated that mining waste, lead smelters, industrial dumps and other toxic

sites affect the health of 125 million people in 49 developing countries.

'We have identified over 200 places with contaminated air, soil or water that are putting at risk some six million people,' said John Pwamang of the Ghana Environment Protection Agency.

'These include places with lead poisoning from recycling used lead-acid or car batteries, and e-waste dismantling areas, where cables are burnt in the open air and the toxic smoke poisons whole neighbourhoods,' Pwamang said in a release.

A growing body of scientific evidence is revealing an astonishing array of illnesses, including cancers, heart disease, diabetes, obesity, ADHD, autism, Alzheimer's and depression, with links to the ever-increasing amount of toxic chemicals in our bodies, said Julian Cribb, author of the new book *Poisoned Planet: How Constant Exposure to Man-Made Chemicals Is Putting Your Life at Risk*.

'There are at least 143,000 man-made chemicals plus an equally vast number of unintentional chemicals liberated by mining, burning fossil fuels, waste disposal,' Cribb said in a release.

'Around 1,000 new industrial chemicals are released every year, which the United Nations says are largely untested for human and environment health and safety.'

GAHP members worldwide have come together to urge the UN to spotlight pollution in the SDGs. A position paper and a draft of GAHP's proposed revised SDG text have been created. These were to be presented to the UN Open Working Group on SDGs, meeting in New York on 16-20 June. — IPS

Despite crisis, Europe continues to protect its banksters

Opposition from practically every state in the European Union to far-reaching financial regulation necessary to prevent a recurrence of the Great Recession has stalled all efforts at reform.

Julio Godoy

MORE than six years after the global financial crisis broke out, European Union (EU) countries continue to protect banks and investment funds from tougher rules, despite abundant evidence of recurrent criminal or reckless activities in the sector, and new accumulation of enormous financial risks.

The latest in a string of scandals involving banks was the revelation in May that at least seven European banks or banks operating in Europe had colluded to falsely fix the Euro Interbank Offered Rate (Euribor).

Euribor is a daily reference rate, published by the European Banking Federation, based on the average interest rates at which eurozone banks offer to lend unsecured funds to other banks in the euro wholesale money market.

‘The [European] Commission has concerns that ... three banks may have taken part in a collusive scheme which aimed at distorting the normal course of pricing components for euro interest rate derivatives,’ the body said in a statement issued on 20 May.

The three banks in question are JPMorgan Chase, HSBC and Crédit Agricole. Another four banks (Barclays, Deutsche Bank, Royal Bank of Scotland and Société Générale), also accused of misconduct concerning Euribor, reached a settlement with European regulators.

Because of such behaviour, bank managers have since 2009 again earned the nickname of ‘banksters’, a combination of ‘banker’ and ‘gangster’ coined in 1937 at the height of the global economic crisis of the time.



JPMorgan Chase is one of the seven banks operating in Europe that were said to have colluded to falsely fix a key reference interest rate.

Experts and analysts complain that despite such criminal activities, and the new accumulation of financial risks, European governments have during the past six years repeatedly intervened to stop far-reaching rules to regulate operations in the financial sector.

The list of actions taken by European governments to spare banks and investment funds from new rules is long. In December last year, the French government managed to arrange for French banks to pay a lower-than-European-average contribution to the EU-created national deposit insurance.

‘To obtain that, France used the friendly support of Michel Barnier, the French European Commissioner for Internal Market and Services,’ says Burkhard Balz, German Member of the European Parliament. Balz is a member of the conservative Christian Democratic Union.

‘Over the last six years we have seen a pattern of behaviour concerning efforts to introduce a Europe-wide financial regulation,’ Udo Bullmann,

a German Social Democratic Member of the European Parliament, told Inter Press Service (IPS).

‘First, the European Commission makes a timid regulating proposal. The European Parliament takes the proposal over and toughens its content. But then it is the turn of governments, and they water the proposal down, even under the original commission level.’

Independent experts agree. ‘The European Union is indeed a community of states, but at the end of the day, the member states compete against each other instead of cooperating to put forward a comprehensive set of rules for financial markets,’ says Joost Mulder of Finance Watch, an independent association set up in 2011 to act as a public interest counterweight to the powerful financial lobby.

‘What the individual states want is to protect their countries’ banks and investment funds,’ Mulder added.

Opposition to far-reaching financial regulation comes from practically every state, but in changing roles. Britain usually opposes rules that

would affect operations at the London financial market. It also has consistently opposed establishing limits for bonuses for financial managers, one of the main reasons for risky investments and moral hazard. Germany and France prefer to pass modest laws on financial aspects, to avoid approving a tougher European binding regulation.

In September last year, Finance Watch published a report on the planned European banking union and the bank reform in the European Union, and concluded that ‘despite its intention, [it] will fail to prevent European citizens from bearing the losses of failed banks in the event of a systemic banking crisis unless there are meaningful structural and capital reforms to Europe’s largest banks’.

The banking union, which should start operations in November, is supposed to create a safety net to minimise the risk of further EU taxpayer-funded bailouts. It foresees a new European authority, the so-called Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM), with the power to wind up or restructure failing banks.

According to Finance Watch, ‘The SRM has the right objectives: namely to enable the orderly resolution of banks in participating member states, and to weaken the interdependencies between financial institutions and their sovereigns.’

But the watchdog group does not see ‘how these objectives can be met without reducing the regulatory incentives that favour sovereign debt, and without a structural reform of bank activities to make bail-in and bank resolution credible’.

According to International Monetary Fund (IMF) figures, in the aftermath of the global financial meltdown of 2008, industrialised countries bailed out private banks to the tune of \$1.75 trillion, or some €1.3 trillion. This amounts to the one-year salary of more than 42 million people earning net average German wages of around €25,000.

The global bank rescue weakened the European states involved, in particular Greece, Spain, Portugal and Ireland, and triggered, among others,



Britain usually opposes rules that would affect operations at the London financial market. Picture shows market traders at work in London.

the present sovereign debt crisis, with its social and human costs.

Another typical example of the lack of will among European governments to improve regulations and reduce risks in financial markets is the long and so far fruitless debate on the introduction of a very low tax on financial transactions, also known as the Tobin tax, after it was suggested by Nobel laureate economist James Tobin in 1972.

In September 2011, the European Commission proposed the introduction of the tax within the 27 member states of the EU by 2014. According to the original proposal, the tax would only impact financial transactions between financial institutions, charging 0.1% against the exchange of shares and bonds and 0.01% across derivative contracts.

According to the initial Commission estimates, the tax could raise up to €57 billion per year. But, as of June 2014, that is, almost three years after the proposal, only 11 EU member countries appear ready to introduce the tax. Furthermore, there is wide disagreement among these 11 countries about which transactions should be taxed and how high the levy should be.

Sven Giegold, German Green Party Member of the European Parliament and expert on international finance, even goes as far as saying that ‘France, nominally a strong supporter of the Tobin tax, actually did kill it.’

In May, during negotiations at the

European Council, the French government opposed raising the Tobin tax on most financial derivatives and on government bonds. Giegold said that ‘France obviously fears that if taxed, banks wouldn’t buy government bonds.’

After such objections, Giegold complained, ‘the original tax on financial transactions has been devaluated to a useless levy to be paid only by small savers’.

A new scheme to avoid new rules for financial markets in Europe is to make them part of supra-regional binding projects, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), currently under negotiation between the EU and the US government.

According to Finance Watch, ‘there is no proven case for including financial services in the TTIP.’ ‘We are concerned that the EU’s approach to regulatory cooperation [within the TTIP negotiations related to financial markets] will encourage convergence around the lowest common standards, not the highest,’ Thierry Philipponnat, Finance Watch’s secretary, said during a recent hearing at the European Parliament.

For Philipponnat, ‘it is difficult to see how the inclusion of financial services in the European Union-US free trade agreement negotiations, and especially the parts on regulatory cooperation, will not lead to a “race to the bottom” in financial services regulation.’ – IPS

Time to act!

With the misuse and overuse of antibiotics leading to the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria, the world stands on the brink of 'a post-antibiotic era'. At this year's World Health Assembly in Geneva, member states of the World Health Organisation underscored the urgency of tackling the crisis and expressed support for a global action plan to contain it. *Shila Kaur reports.*

ON 24 May, in the face of what is undoubtedly a global health emergency, the Antibiotic Resistance Coalition, a multi-sectoral collaboration among civil society organisations, called on World Health Organisation (WHO) member states to pass a critical resolution on antimicrobial resistance (AMR) at the 67th World Health Assembly (WHA). This resolution, which was eventually adopted by the WHA, will give WHO member states the mandate to develop or strengthen national plans and strategies and international collaboration for the containment and control of the escalating AMR crisis.

(According to footnote 1 of the resolution, 'Antimicrobial resistance refers to the loss of effectiveness of any anti-infective medicine, including antiviral, antifungal, antibacterial and anti-parasitic medicines. Antibiotic resistance refers only to resistance to medicines in bacteria.')

Every year governments meet at the WHA, WHO's highest decision-making body, to discuss and seek consensus on tackling urgent global public health issues. At this year's WHA, held from 19-24 May in Geneva, 35 WHO member states (some of whom spoke on behalf of the EU, African, Middle Eastern and CIS countries) sent a clear and strong message of support for the resolution and the global action plan to contain the spread of AMR, which has reached crisis levels across national boundaries.

Antibiotic resistance threatens to undermine the effectiveness of modern medicine as increasingly more strains of bacteria become resistant to an ever-rising number of antibiotics. The ramifications will be devastating to both human and animal health because there are no new antibiotics to



This year's World Health Assembly (pic) adopted a resolution which gives WHO member states the mandate to develop or strengthen national plans and strategies and international collaboration to combat the escalating crisis of antimicrobial resistance.

treat some of the most serious infections. Millions of people have been infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria and hundreds of thousands lose their lives each year. Without a radical change in antibiotic usage, antibiotic resistance will become one of the greatest threats to humankind, to security and to the global economy.

The seriousness of the AMR threat was underscored during an event on the sidelines of this year's WHA. The side event was jointly organised by the delegations of the UK, the Netherlands, Turkey and Ghana on 20 May. Led by Dame Sally Davies, the Chief Medical Officer of the UK and a formidable global advocate on AMR, the four-member panel addressed national challenges and responses to AMR in Ghana, Turkey and the Netherlands.

Dame Sally stated emphatically that the UK government was committed 'to the highest level' in the fight against the bugs. She emphasised that

currently there was insufficient data across the world on the true state of AMR; there was a critical need, therefore, for countries to recognise the challenges and reduce the threats that AMR posed to public health.

The spread of NDM1 to 18 countries within the time period of one year had shown that there was an urgent need for global cooperation. The situation is dire because there are no incentives for industry to 'get the innovation pipelines right'.

'There is a public health tension in that governments want to conserve the [antibiotics] that exist while the industry's motive is to market for profit,' she stated.

Effective surveillance systems, rapid diagnostics, appropriate vaccines and innovative approaches are the need of the day. 'If we fail, we face daunting economic consequences,' she stated.

On 30 April, ahead of the WHA, WHO had launched its first Global

Report on Surveillance 2014. This report, with data provided by 114 countries, is the most comprehensive to date and reveals that antibiotic resistance is no longer a prediction for the future but is happening right now, across the world. Standard treatments no longer work; infections are harder or impossible to control; the risk of the spread of infection to others is increased; illness and hospital stays are prolonged, with added economic and social costs; and the risk of death is greater – in some cases, twice that of patients who have infections caused by non-resistant bacteria.

‘The problem is so serious that it threatens the achievements of modern medicine. A post-antibiotic era – in which common infections and minor injuries can kill – is a very real possibility for the 21st century,’ states the report.

The most important findings of the report are:

- There are very high rates of resistance globally in common bacteria (such as *Escherichia coli*, *Klebsiella pneumonia* and *Staphylococcus aureus*) that cause common



A malaria patient. Resistance to earlier-generation antimalarial drugs is widespread in most malaria-endemic countries.

healthcare-associated and community-acquired infections (such as urinary tract infections, wound infections, bloodstream infections and pneumonia).

- Many gaps exist in information on pathogens of major public health importance. There are significant gaps in surveillance and a lack of standards for methodology, data sharing and coordination. Overall, surveillance of antibiotic resistance is nei-



A doctor examining a patient with multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). In 2012, there were about 450,000 new cases of MDR-TB, which requires treatment courses that are much longer and less effective than those for non-resistant TB.

ther coordinated nor harmonised.

At the time of the launch of the WHO report, more than 20 civil society organisations from all sectors on six continents came together for a meeting to hash out a Survival Plan on AMR. The 28 April-1 May meeting resulted in the formation of the Antibiotic Resistance Coalition (ARC), which agreed to work together urgently to avert the looming post-antibiotic catastrophe (see following article). The Coalition affirmed that in order to conserve their effectiveness, it was imperative that clinically useful antibiotics be viewed as a finite

resource and a global, essential public good. Current thinking which viewed bacteria as adversaries had to be changed in order to better understand their importance for human, animal and ecosystem well-being with particular respect to policy and practice for antibiotic use.

No new antibiotics have been created since 1987. Since then, the spread of antibiotic resistance has increased dramatically. ‘Public leadership is

crucial to enact new, needs-driven research and development models, with open research and transparent data, which support rational use and equitable access to antibiotics,’ said the Coalition.

In 2012, there were about 450,000 new cases of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB). Extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) has been identified in 92 countries. MDR-TB requires treatment courses that are much longer and less effective than those for non-resistant TB.

Resistance to earlier-generation antimalarial drugs is widespread in most malaria-endemic countries. Further spread, or emergence in other regions, of artemisinin-resistant strains of malaria could jeopardise important recent gains in control of the disease.

Treatment failures due to resistance to treatments of last resort for gonorrhea (third-generation cephalosporins) have now been reported from 10 countries. Gonorrhea may soon become untreatable as no vaccines or new drugs are in development.

Last year the US Centers for Disease Control (CDC) came out with its Threats Report which stated that over two million Americans fall sick each year with antibiotic-resistant infections, with at least 23,000 dying as a

result. The CDC cautions that this is a minimum estimate.

The ARC has stressed: 'National-level action is paramount, international cooperation is essential, and the collective responsibility of all stakeholders is crucial in order to bring about a solution to the escalating healthcare crisis caused by antibiotic resistance.'

One driver of antibiotic resistance is the unnecessarily reckless use of antibiotics in food animals for industrial meat production. For example, 80% of the antibiotics sold in the US are directed towards industrial meat and dairy production, largely to spur growth – not to treat disease. The more antibiotics are used and interact with bacteria, the faster resistance to antibiotics develops. Effective action on antibiotic resistance therefore requires multi-sector collaboration.

While the EU countries are far ahead with regard to regulations and control on the use of antibiotics in food animals, many countries lag far behind. This year, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) came out with voluntary guidelines to stop the use of antibiotics as growth promoters in animals. The meat and drug industries have seemingly embraced these guidelines because there is no enforcement and it is easy to use the same drugs under the guise of prophylactic treatment.

And in 2013, even the World Economic Forum, where governments and big business meet, issued a high-profile Global Risks Report that describes how antibiotic resistance can not only overwhelm our health systems but also damage our social and economic systems. Clearly, there is 'no time to lose', as an Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy report with the same title documents. The science is clear, the crisis is urgent. Countries cannot afford to lose any more time in tackling the AMR threat. We must act now to implement the WHA resolution on combating antimicrobial resistance, including antibiotic resistance. ♦

Shila Kaur is health consultant with the Third World Network.

Pandemic Preparedness

Creating a Fair and Equitable Influenza Virus and Benefit Sharing System

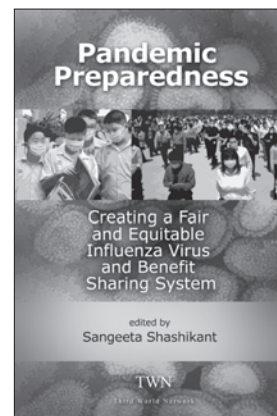
Edited by Sangeeta Shashikant

The WHO, a specialised agency of the United Nations, is mandated to achieve the highest possible level of health for all peoples.

However, in 2007 world attention was focused on WHO when it emerged that WHO's 'Global Influenza Surveillance Network' (GISN) was unfair to the interests and needs of developing countries. This scheme, focused on ensuring that countries shared influenza viruses, failed to deliver fair and equitable benefit sharing, a crucial element to ensure access to vaccines, anti-virals and other technologies at affordable prices to developing countries that were most affected during a severe influenza outbreak of pandemic potential. It also emerged that developed country governments and their entities were winners in the scheme as they profited from the virus sharing system, including by having timely access to vaccines and making IPRs claims over the shared biological materials and products developed using such materials.

Meanwhile, developing countries could face astronomical bills for the purchase of vaccines and other medical supplies, as well as difficulties in accessing such supplies, due to their limited availability. Latest technologies as well as know-how used in vaccine development and production (largely based in developed countries) were also protected by IPRs, creating more obstacles for developing countries that might seek to build their own production capacity.

All these issues came to a head at the 60th WHA in 2007, leading to the adoption of Resolution WHA60.28 titled 'Pandemic Influenza Preparedness: sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other



ISBN: 978-967-5412-20-2 232pp

benefits'. Negotiations to create a fair and equitable influenza virus and benefit sharing framework in the context of pandemic influenza preparedness are ongoing in WHO.

This book provides an in-depth understanding of the background to, and rationale for, the current WHO negotiations on influenza virus and benefit sharing as well as a front-line view of the negotiations.

	Price	Postage
Malaysia	RM20.00	RM2.00
Third World countries	US\$9.00	US\$4.50 (air); US\$2.00 (sea)
Other foreign countries	US\$12.00	US\$6.00 (air); US\$2.00 (sea)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order.

Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of: **THIRD WORLD NETWORK BHD.**, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: twnet@po.jaring.my; Website: www.twn.my

I would like to order copy/copies of **Pandemic Preparedness**.

I enclose the amount of by cheque/bank draft/IMO.

Please charge the amount of US\$/Euro/RM to my credit card:

☐

American Express

☐

Visa

☐

Mastercard

A/c No.: _____ Expiry date: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

CSOs call for global action to tackle antimicrobial resistance

In calling for international leadership and concerted global action to tackle the escalating antibiotic resistance crisis, a coalition of civil society organisations (CSOs) has stressed that consumer protection and public health must trump the pursuit of profit, and that effective antibiotics are global public goods. *Kanaga Raja reports.*

CIVIL society organisations (CSOs) and other stakeholders across six continents, grouped under the newly established Antibiotic Resistance Coalition, have called for international leadership and concerted global action to address the escalating crisis surrounding antimicrobial resistance.

In this regard, they urged the member states of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to pass a critical resolution on ‘Combating antimicrobial resistance, including antibiotic resistance’ at the 67th session of the World Health Assembly.

The resolution, which, amongst others, requests the WHO Director-General to develop a draft global action plan to combat antimicrobial resistance, including antibiotic resistance, was eventually approved at the WHA.

‘Antimicrobial resistance – and particularly antibiotic resistance – is the most pressing public health issue facing the global community,’ said Otto Cars, founder of ReAct (Action on Antibiotic Resistance), in a Coalition press release. ‘If the resolution is not passed, and the WHO and its Member States do not act quickly, there will be disastrous global health consequences.’

According to the Antibiotic Resistance Coalition, public health researchers estimate that, each year, millions of people around the world are infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria, and hundreds of thousands of them die, and that without immediate action, that toll is expected to worsen.

‘We are on the precipice of a post-antibiotic era,’ said Tim Reed, execu-



Without a radical change in antibiotic usage, antibiotic resistance will become one of the greatest threats to humankind.

tive director of Health Action International. ‘Without a radical shift in the way antibiotics are marketed and used – and unless we overcome the gap in antibiotics discovery – antibiotic resistance will continue to become one of the greatest threats to humankind.’

In releasing a Declaration on Antibiotic Resistance on 22 May, the Antibiotic Resistance Coalition underscored that consumer protection and public health must trump the pursuit of profit, and that effective antibiotics are global public goods.

Various research studies trace accelerating trends in growth of antimicrobial and antibiotic resistance for disease treatments to the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in human medicine, industrial food animal production and the food-processing sectors,

in commercial animal husbandry for routine disease prevention in livestock, and their use for growth promotion.

Among the original signatories to the Coalition’s Declaration are the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics, the Centre for Science and Environment, Consumers International, Food and Animal Concerns Trust, Health Action International, Healthy Food Action, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, People’s Health Movement, Public Citizen, ReAct – Action on Antibiotic Resistance, South Centre, Sustainable Food Trust, Third World Network, Universities Allied for Essential Medicines and What Next Forum.

‘Member States must deliver a strong mandate to WHO to not only

develop a pressing action plan on antimicrobial resistance, but also to ensure that public health is prioritised over commercial interests,' said Chee Yoke Ling, programme director with the Third World Network. 'Access to affordable and effective antibiotics is of particular importance for developing countries.'

The Coalition called for international leadership and action to, in part: prohibit the promotion and advertising of antibiotics; promote new, needs-driven and open research and development models based on the principle of de-linkage (divorcing price from research and development costs and sales volumes); phase out the use of antimicrobials for routine disease prevention in livestock, and end their use, altogether, for growth promotion; build robust systems, in all countries, to monitor and report antibiotic use and resistance trends in humans and animals; and improve public awareness to support an ecological understanding of human-bacteria interaction and behaviour change around antibiotic use.

In its Declaration on Antibiotic Resistance, the Coalition said that antibiotic resistance threatens to undermine the effectiveness of modern medicine.

'More and more strains of bacteria are resistant to an ever-rising number of antibiotics, with no new antibiotics on the horizon to treat some of the most serious infections. The change is global and accelerating. Millions of people are infected with antibiotic-resistant bacteria each year; hundreds of thousands lose their lives. The toll will increase,' it said.

Antibiotic use causes resistance to emerge, and their misuse and over-use accelerates its spread. Without a radical change in antibiotic usage, antibiotic resistance will become one of the greatest threats to humankind, to security and to the global economy, the Coalition warned, further noting that efforts to slow the march towards this dire future have largely failed.

In its Declaration, the Coalition affirmed, amongst others, that clinically useful antibiotics are a finite resource and a global, essential public



The growth of antimicrobial resistance has been attributed, among others, to the misuse of antibiotics in commercial animal husbandry for routine disease prevention in livestock and their use for growth promotion.

good, and that consumer protection and public health must not be subordinated by governments or international institutions to the pursuit of profit.

'Public leadership is needed to enact new, needs-driven research and development models, with open research and transparent data, which support rational use and equitable access to antibiotics,' it said. 'National-level action is paramount, international cooperation is essential, and the collective responsibility of all stakeholders is crucial in order to bring about a solution to the escalating healthcare crisis caused by antibiotic resistance.'

The Coalition further affirmed that effective action on antibiotic resistance requires that the social and economic determinants of infectious diseases be addressed. In many parts of the world, these are manifested through poverty, exploitation, international power relations and local inequities, as well as through poor access to nutrition, safe drinking water and sanitation.

The Coalition said it commits itself, according to the principles and actions laid out in its Declaration, 'to urgently work to avert the looming post-antibiotic catastrophe'.

According to the Declaration,

lack of effective antibiotics is a global concern with the potential to affect all humans and domesticated animals. It threatens to undermine the effectiveness of modern healthcare. An ever-widening range of bacteria, causing a spectrum of diseases in humans and animals, is becoming resistant to most available antibiotics.

'Unchecked, escalating antibiotic resistance will lead to the global spread of untreatable infections and massive deterioration in health and loss of life. It will also make most surgery impossible and end organ transplantation and cancer chemotherapy.'

While antibiotic resistance is a natural phenomenon, it has greatly accelerated with decades of unrestrained marketing by the pharmaceutical industry, which promotes over-use and misuse of antibiotics in human medicine, industrial food animal production and the food-processing sectors. For some infections resistance has already reached critical levels, said the Coalition.

'Inadequate regulation and control of the sale and use of antibiotics in animals and humans, including financial incentives for prescribers and dispensers, has been a major factor leading to this crisis.'

According to the Coalition, inter-

national organisations, such as WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), ‘have so far failed to exercise effective leadership in the stewardship and responsible use of antibiotics’.

National bodies that set food standards and regulate pharmaceuticals have largely failed to control human and animal antibiotic use. Data systems for monitoring antibiotic resistance and use remain very fragmented.

‘New trade and investment regimes threaten to place commercial interests above public health and consumer protection, thereby undercutting effective control of antibiotic use and resistance,’ said the Declaration.

The policy frameworks for research and development are further fuelling resistance without advancing innovation. They are failing to build on available scientific research in developing new antibiotics and diagnostics, and there is a severe antibiotic discovery gap. They are also failing to ensure access for people who need treatment and are ineffective in limiting excessive and irrational use of antibiotics.

The Declaration asserted that antibiotic treatments and diagnostics should be considered global public goods – common resources requiring common stewardship.

‘Effective regulation and control of antibiotics must be exercised to ensure that existing and new antibiotics are made available and are affordable to those in need in all countries, while not being overused or misused. This calls for further strengthening of public health systems everywhere.’

All countries should adopt a national policy on rational use of antibiotics, as well as taking necessary action to prevent excessive antibiotic use. Regulatory controls must address prescription and marketing practices, it said.

Activities to curb excessive use must include better training of health professionals through non-commercial, evidence-based programmes and sustained and targeted public education. Standard treatment guidelines



Otto Cars, founder of ReAct (Action on Antibiotic Resistance): ‘Antimicrobial resistance – and particularly antibiotic resistance – is the most pressing public health issue facing the global community.’

should inform antibiotic administration.

‘Antibiotic stewardship, involving optimal antibiotic drug regimens and appropriate duration of therapy and route of administration, as well as future effectiveness, should be incentivised, and unnecessary use should be dis-incentivised.’

The Coalition stressed that the public sector in every country needs to build a robust national system for monitoring antibiotic use and resistance trends in humans and animals, as well as contributing to the development of an effective global monitoring system.

Diagnostic uncertainty must be minimised through development and availability of rapid diagnostic tools and techniques. This is instrumental for timely determination of the nature of infection and to prevent irrational use of antibiotics. Promotion and advertising of antibiotics, including marketing for inappropriate uses or incentivising medical and veterinary personnel to overuse or inappropriately prescribe antibiotics, is harmful to health and should be prohibited.

‘We should avoid seeing ourselves as being at war with bacteria and learn to live more harmoniously with them, except on the rare occasions when infectious strains threaten

our health. Treatment of infections must be balanced with the importance of maintaining healthy populations of bacteria for humans and animals,’ said the Coalition.

Antibiotics in food production

The preservation of effective antibiotics for human health should take priority over their use for commercial gain in food production. A disproportionately high amount of antibiotics is used in animals, particularly in the industrial production of food animals. Antibiotics should only be used for treating animals when indicated by a genuine therapeutic need and based on antibiotic therapeutic guidelines.

‘Antibiotic use for mass disease prevention must not substitute for good animal husbandry and welfare. Farm practices such as overcrowding, unhygienic conditions, inappropriate diets, and early weaning requiring routine antibiotic administration, must be prohibited. Similarly, antibiotic use for growth promotion must be banned,’ said the Declaration.

Antibiotics considered critically important for humans must not be used for animals, except in specific circumstances in order to save life or prevent serious suffering, it added, recommending that regulations be instituted and enforced to ensure antibiotics are marked with appropriate warnings and clear distinctions between human and animal use, so as to help control and monitor antibiotic consumption.

The Coalition further said that food produced without routine use of antibiotics and without antibiotic residues should be labelled through reliable, certified schemes to facilitate consumer choice. Likewise, it added that food produced with routine use of antibiotics must be clearly labelled, until effective prohibition of such antibiotic use can be introduced.

‘Civil society and consumer movements should target the supply chain by exposing and boycotting corporations that produce or provide food with routine use of antibiotics.’

‘Short of radical changes in our

innovation system, we stand at the precipice of a post-antibiotic era. We call for public leadership promoting new, needs-driven research and development models based on the principle of de-linkage: divorcing price from research and development costs, as well as from sales volumes,' said the Coalition.

It underlined that public funding is essential, and benefits of these investments should accrue to the public. In addition, incentives should target new antibiotics with novel mechanisms of action or with significant public health value.

'We must couple these incentives with measures conserving antibiotics use,' said the Coalition.

Further noting that innovation requires access to the building blocks of knowledge, the Coalition called for public leadership to establish pooled efforts and support open research. These might include enriching compound libraries with potential new drug candidates, providing specimen banks to aid developers of new diagnostics, building clinical trial networks to ease recruitment of patients, sharing pre-clinical and clinical data, and publishing findings in open access journals.

'We call for public leadership to establish a network of bio-repositories that can harness biodiversity for natural products that might be tomorrow's antibiotics. This will require committing public funding, enlisting the informed participation of low- and middle-income countries, where much of this biodiversity exists, in the process of innovation, and ensuring returns through fair and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements with those countries.'

Complete trial data and other information concerning the safety, efficacy and resistance profiles of antibiotics and diagnostics should be made publicly available, to advance scientific progress and rational use, with privacy protections in place.

'We reject additional intellectual property measures. These are likely to compromise patient access and reward high sales volumes without altering the current failing incentives

structure. The needs of one patient group should not be sacrificed to another, for example, via proposals for an Intellectual Property (IP) voucher that would transfer the cost of antibiotic development to other patient groups,' said the Coalition in its Declaration.

The paramount concern of regulatory review of new antibiotics must be the improved health outcomes and safety of patients facing multi-drug-resistant infections. In recent years, drug regulatory agencies have amended regulations for antibiotics to approve them based on clinical trials with small sample sizes and surrogate endpoints.

However, the Coalition stressed, lowering standards of clinical trials only to incentivise drug companies to bring drugs to market without significant public health benefit is not acceptable.

'A broad, holistic approach, based on an ecological understanding of bacteria, should be encouraged so as to spur innovative ways of discovering new antibiotics as well as finding solutions and approaches to infections other than through the use of antibiotics,' said the civil society groups.

International action

With respect to international action and cooperation, the Coalition said that a global framework for action must be developed by governments through the United Nations system, in close collaboration with all stakeholders, and that such a framework must include targets and ways of tracking their achievement that can be applied according to national circumstances.

'National governments should formulate specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound targets for controlling antibiotic resistance.'

International cooperation should support low- and middle-income countries financially and technically, including through capacity-building, to enable them to implement the set targets effectively, said the Coalition,

adding that international action should ensure that the terms of any global, regional and bilateral trade, investment or intellectual property rules do not undermine laws and policies that aim to implement effective controls over antibiotics.

International organisations, including both the United Nations system and other institutions, should scale up their actions and coordination to match the urgency of the crisis posed by antibiotic resistance, said the Coalition.

In this regard, it called on WHO to enhance its efforts to take a genuine leadership role by significantly expanding its in-house capacity, making a strong case for member states to provide the necessary funds, providing enhanced training and policy guidance to developing countries for strengthened national regulatory structures, establishing closer collaboration with organisations and movements with non-profit, public health interests at the core, and effectively challenging institutions and interests working against the containment of antibiotic resistance.

'The Codex Alimentarius, the joint WHO and FAO international food standards, should develop new sets of standards for antibiotic use in food animals which takes into account not only residues in food, but also antibiotic resistance.'

In addition, the Coalition said that FAO and OIE should prioritise efforts to ensure radical reductions of antibiotics use in food production and processing, and not shy away from the far-reaching implications this may have on the industrial agriculture model of food production.

It also called on international organisations to work together with national governments to develop a robust system of surveillance of antibiotics usage and resistance.

The Coalition's Declaration on Antibiotic Resistance can be found at www.reactgroup.org. ◆

Kanaga Raja is Editor of the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS), which is published by the Third World Network. This article is reproduced from SUNS (No. 7810, 23 May 2014).

New momentum to act against antibiotic resistance

Governments at the recent World Health Assembly (WHA) have committed to a higher level of action to combat antibiotic resistance that is an increasing public health threat across the world.

Mirza Alas and Chee Yoke Ling

ON 24 May, a resolution was approved by health ministers on 'Combating antimicrobial resistance, including antibiotic resistance' after an important exchange of country positions and one amendment put forward by Mexico with regard to conflict of interests.

The 67th session of the WHA took place in Geneva from 19 to 24 May with six days of intense discussions on a large list of global public health topics.

More than 20 resolutions on public health issues of global importance were adopted. According to Margaret Chan, WHO's Director-General, in an official press release, 'This has been an intense Health Assembly, with a record-breaking number of agenda items, documents and resolutions, and nearly 3,500 registered delegates.'

India supported the antimicrobial resistance (AMR) resolution subject to the understanding that its concerns would be included in the proposed global plan of action. These included financial access of developing countries' patients to new antibiotics, new ways of funding research and development based on the de-linkage principle in the context of developing countries, and the special needs of developing countries and their capacity-building to take on relevant activities. India's proposal was in lieu of making changes in the resolution text itself, which was its first preference.

The United Kingdom, in its statement, also acknowledged the legitimate concern of developing countries on access to antibiotics, and the im-

portance of support for technical capacities and affordable drugs.

All WHO member states agreed on the importance and magnitude of antimicrobial resistance and broad support was heard in the statements made by all delegations on the paramount need to take action. Both developing and developed countries agreed that this is of global magnitude and urged WHO to develop the action plan and member states to build up their own national plans.

Developing countries stressed on the urgency of the problem but also on the importance of ensuring access to new antibiotics for developing countries and the mobilisation of resources so that they can implement action plans and surveillance.

Below are the highlights of several country statements that supported the resolution at the WHA. (A new civil society coalition, the Antibiotic Resistance Coalition, also made a statement, presented by one of its founding members, Health Action International.)

Lebanon said that extensive use

and misuse of antimicrobials in human and animal health has resulted in AMR which now constitutes a serious threat to health and global health security. It noted that the 2001 WHO Global Strategy for the Containment of AMR has not been realised and expressed strong support for the strategy and next steps. It stressed the need for strong commitment from member states, international organisations and the food industry. In particular, Lebanon highlighted that self-medication and over-the-counter use of antibiotics is widespread in developing countries and needs more attention.

China stressed on how WHO and member states have conducted work on fighting AMR but the situation remains daunting. It also emphasised the need for rational clinical use and stressed that in the case of China, supervision of marketing and a surveillance network has been established. It also placed emphasis on the need to examine the role of animal husbandry and the food industry on this issue and the importance of raising awareness among medical institutions



A technical briefing session at the World Health Assembly. All WHO member states at the WHA agreed on the importance and magnitude of antimicrobial resistance and on the paramount need to take action.

WHO/Violaine Martin

and health workers on rational use.

In supporting the resolution, China underlined the need to take action to conduct multi-country, multi-channel and multi-sectoral cooperation.

Singapore said that AMR is a global problem of large magnitude, requiring a global solution. It said further that the WHO Global Report on Surveillance 2014 on AMR released just before the WHA was a good sign, adding that the United Kingdom and Sweden had done a lot in terms of putting AMR on the global agenda.

Thailand appreciated the international cooperation and collaboration amongst WHO, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and strongly supported the resolution. It said that the size of the problem is big and global collective action is needed, and stressed that both human health and agricultural sectors have to be addressed. Irrational use and overuse of antimicrobials in agriculture is a matter of serious concern, said Thailand, adding that human antimicrobials used in agriculture can lead to a reservoir of resistant bacteria. It stressed that the management of AMR needs strong political support and also called for new antibiotics and rational use of them. It asked WHO to develop a global action plan.

Qatar reiterated that the threat of AMR is great and pointed to the lack of new medicines to combat AMR. It also noted the need to have policy guidance, monitoring and research.

Mexico recognised the need to strengthen measures on AMR and noted how AMR is the main cause of health problems that have major impacts on the economy. It emphasised the need to deal with AMR at the global level respecting specificities at each level and called for new strategies and new models to deal with use of antibiotics. Mexico proposed an amendment to the second paragraph, sub-paragraph six of the resolution (OP2.6), which was to add at the end the phrase ‘taking into account the need to manage possible conflicts of interest’.



Civil society has stressed the need to de-link the costs of research and development from the price of health technologies.

(OP2.6 refers to ‘a multi-sectoral approach to inform the drafting of the global action plan, by consulting Member States as well as other relevant stakeholders, especially other multilateral stakeholders, such as FAO and OIE; ...’. Engagement with ‘non-state actors’ was one of the important issues addressed at the WHA where conflict of interest in the relationship between industry and WHO has been raised by several member states and civil society organisations.)

Malaysia stressed on the need for awareness and action at the highest level, and the need for concrete action including sanitation and hygiene, use of vaccines when possible, innovation in service delivery as well as health promotion and communication programmes to change the present culture on antimicrobial use.

India noted the emergence of new AMR mechanisms and how this is making it difficult or impossible to treat certain infections. It also expressed support for the global action plan which should be developed in close collaboration with all relevant partners and stakeholders while avoiding conflict of interests. In stressing that AMR has been a priority for India, it also said that the South East Asia Regional Strategy for Prevention and Containment of AMR and the Jaipur Declaration of health ministers of the region on AMR are the guiding principles for building capacity to combat AMR.

India said further that the preven-

tion of transmission of infectious disease gains new urgency in the face of resistance to chemotherapy for tuberculosis, HIV and hepatitis. A fresh and strong initiative around infection control in healthcare settings is therefore urgent. It strongly believes that ways to ensure financial accessibility of people to new antibiotics have to be better addressed in the global action plan; otherwise new antibiotics may be prohibitive for patients in developing countries, similar to the situation for second- and third-line antiretroviral drugs.

New ways of funding research and development based on the de-linkage principle need to be explored in the context of the developing world, India emphasised. It added that the challenge of AMR adds weight to the proposed R&D Treaty and supporting transfer of technologies to ensure access to medicines for low-income countries.

India also stressed the need to address the specific needs of developing countries and their capacity-building to undertake the relevant activities. It is important to help mobilise financial and technical resources to support the developing countries and their special needs for strengthening national laboratory-based surveillance capacities; as well as forging networks to produce comparable data and inform evidence-based treatment guidelines. Its understanding is that the proposed global plan of action would take into account these

concerns, paving the way for an effective global action on containment of AMR. Subject to this understanding, India supported the draft resolution.

Ghana spoke on behalf of the African Region (AFRO) and underlined that the growing prevalence of AMR poses challenges and threats to health security especially for countries with low surveillance and laboratory capacity. It emphasised that AMR threatens the security of public health control particularly for TB, malaria and HIV control.

Ghana also pointed out that a number of countries have developed national action plans on AMR and urged member states that do not have action plans to develop them. It also reiterated the need for regulations to ensure new innovations for new antibiotics and the importance of collaboration between policymakers, academia and industry to develop new antimicrobials. It said that field epidemiology and laboratory programmes in Africa are being developed.

AFRO is convinced that coordinated efforts are necessary and encouraged WHO to lead and support action plans in both human and animal health, adding that hygiene, infection control and rational drug use are crucial. Ghana emphasised the need for the global action plan to take into consideration the specific needs of developing countries, as well as access to new antibiotics and diagnosis. It supported the resolution as amended by Mexico.

South Africa supported the statement made by Ghana and the resolution. It pointed out that control and adherence to antibiotics are key interventions. It underlined the particular challenges for developing countries on the optimisation of surveillance systems, especially in countries where those systems do not exist. It emphasised the need for investments in those systems and that the agricultural sector must be addressed.

The Philippines supported the adoption of the draft resolution which will expedite and strengthen the implementation of national, regional and

challenges need to be overcome such as finance and infrastructure issues.

Turkey pointed out that AMR is location-specific and that it is necessary to understand regional dynamics, sharing information on its national and Central Asian efforts. It also supported the amendment proposed by Mexico.

Brazil, Bahrain, Libya, Qatar and Vietnam also spoke in support of the resolution.

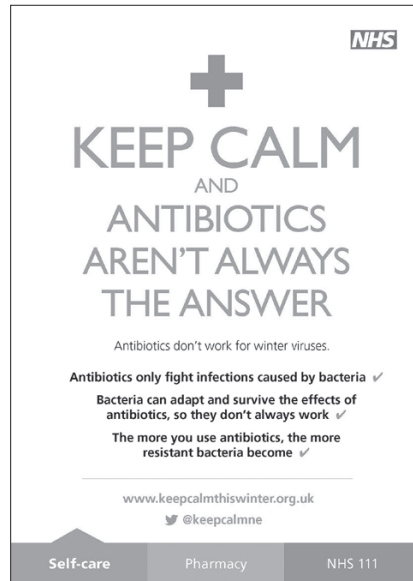
Most of the developed countries that spoke emphasised the global nature of the problem, the need for a global action plan and the importance of WHO in guiding the process.

Australia noted the impact of AMR on all countries and said that it has committed resources to contain microbial resistance, stressing that it is time to move from advocacy to action.

Norway called for the global action plan to be received in the next WHA and for the implementation of this action plan. Norway offered the possibility of co-hosting a meeting to discuss cooperation on actions to implement the global action plan on AMR.

Greece, on behalf of the European Union, stressed the growing public health threat of AMR, and emphasised the crucial role of WHO in monitoring and surveillance of AMR and its effects for human health. The EU highlighted the need for global action and leadership on AMR by WHO and the need for a One Health approach involving human, animal, environment and agriculture. Adding that a multi-sectoral approach is needed, it said that there is an integrated action plan in the EU on these lines which supports the development of a global action plan.

Sweden also called for an inter-sectoral approach and said that AMR is a threat for low-, middle- and high-income countries. It emphasised the important leadership role of WHO in the global action plan and also urged member states to support the development of a global action plan, facilitated by the WHO secretariat. Sweden announced that it will co-host an expert meeting on surveillance with



A poster developed for an antibiotics awareness campaign in the UK. The importance of raising awareness on rational use of antibiotics was highlighted during discussion of the World Health Assembly resolution on antimicrobial resistance.

global evidence-based actions on AMR. It talked about implementation of its national policy and plan to control AMR and noted that AMR surveillance in the Western Pacific is a major development to handle AMR. It stressed its commitment to continue leading the surveillance for the Western Pacific region together with WHO.

Tanzania aligned itself with Ghana's statement on behalf of AFRO and supported the global action plan as well as the work of the WHO strategic and technical advisory group (STAG). It expressed concern about losing the first-line antibiotic which is having impacts on treatment length, stressing that a major challenge is irrational prescribing and irrational use. It also urged the WHO secretariat to address the specific needs of developing countries and ensure access to new antibiotics and diagnostics.

Indonesia acknowledged the global efforts that have been taken to address AMR and shared information on its national efforts. It fully realised the importance of novel antibiotics and diagnostics in healthcare settings for addressing AMR and recognised that in order to address AMR many

WHO which will build on the WHO Global Report on Surveillance 2014. It also expressed its support for the resolution as amended by Mexico.

The UK underlined how the cross-regional support for the resolution demonstrated that it is not only a developed- or developing-country issue but a global problem. The UK recognised the legitimate concern of developing countries on access to antibiotics and said that technical capacities as well as affordable drugs must be supported. (This was a reference to the statement by India.) It approved the resolution with the amendment by Mexico.

The Russian Federation, speaking on behalf of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), underscored the need for a comprehensive approach towards AMR with veterinary, agriculture and human medicine sectors. Dealing with AMR needs comprehensive action and measures within the healthcare system, including boosting access to laboratory research on AMR; monitoring antibiotic resistance research on key microorganisms; quality control; and reducing the unnecessary consumption of antibiotics.

The United States supported the action plan with stakeholders and multi-sectoral action (human and animal health). It also supported innovative collaboration especially public-private partnerships. It underlined the importance of surveillance and said further that the US, the EU and the Trans Atlantic Task Force is a model to follow for shared information and joint research. It also agreed with Mexico's amendment.

Japan called attention to the way AMR often spreads through hospital-acquired infections and the need for more efforts to address this.

The Netherlands urged member states to 'act now and together' and noted the challenges faced in recent years, in both human and animal health, and how they cannot be solved by countries on their own. It pointed out the need for actions at the national level, but equally, the importance of cooperation at regional and at global levels.

The Netherlands will be co-sponsoring a meeting with WHO in June and supported the resolution with the amendment by Mexico.

Germany shared information on its national actions, stressing that AMR does not stop at national borders. Accordingly, Germany supported the need for a global action plan, adding that the international leadership of WHO is extremely important in this regard. It also emphasised that current practices of selling antibiotics in many countries need to be addressed.

Austria, Spain, France, Canada and the Republic of Korea also spoke in support of the resolution.

At the end of the country interventions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had an opportunity to address the WHA delegates. Stichting Health Action International, on behalf of Health Action International and the Antibiotic Resistance Coalition, urged strong global leadership from both the WHA and the WHO secretariat, and requested that WHO be given the mandate to provide clear leadership to coordinate efforts to address antibiotic resistance. As a consequence, all member states must look to their contributions to ensure that WHO has sufficient resources to fulfil its vital leadership role.

It further suggested that the WHO Director-General be asked to consider a comprehensive framework convention as a core component of the global action plan, and that member states commit to the development and implementation of specific, measurable and realistic targets for the reduction of antibiotic resistance.

The Coalition also urged the WHA to consider the following recommendations in the resolution and global plan of action: end the use of antimicrobials for growth promotion and phase out use for routine disease prevention in livestock; introduce comprehensive antibiotic resistance monitoring, including baseline surveys of availability and use of antibiotics; strengthen the reference to innovation of new antibiotics, including through de-linking the costs of R&D from the price of health tech-

nologies; and mention explicitly the need to ban direct-to-consumer promotion and curb all forms of promotion to doctors, veterinarians and farmers.

The Coalition statement also pledged that global civil society is prepared to assume its role as a partner in the development and implementation of a comprehensive global action plan that makes certain the threat of a post-antibiotic period does not become a reality.

NGO statements were also made by Medecins Sans Frontieres and Medicus Mundi International.

In the conclusion of the agenda item, the WHO secretariat representative Keiji Fukuda summarised that there had been a large number of speakers and interventions from many countries, with each highlighting the importance of AMR. The way forward was to work collectively and develop a global action plan. The action plan needed to cross all sectors, have member state voices and capture principles from the One Health approach.

Fukuda emphasised the need to close the gap using research and innovation and the need to highlight prevention. He also acknowledged that in order to have a successful global action plan, the specific needs of developing countries such as capacity-building had to be considered. There must be a balance of the different realities, but also common guidelines.

He said further that political will, technical support and funding were essential. Other pathogens apart from bacteria must also be addressed. He then read the amendment proposed by Mexico in paragraph 2.6 as follows: 'to apply a multi-sectoral approach to inform the drafting of the global action plan, by consulting Member States as well as other relevant stakeholders, taking into account the need to avoid conflict of interest...'

The resolution with the amendment was accordingly approved. ♦

Mirza Alas is a researcher with the Third World Network. Chee Yoke Ling is director of programmes at TWN. This article is reproduced from the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS, No. 7814, 2 June 2014).

Big Pharma fails in bid to influence WHO regulatory norms on medical products

An attempt by the pharmaceutical industries of Europe, Japan and the US to influence the development of WHO regulatory norms on medical products has been rebuffed. *KM Gopakumar reports.*

PHARMACEUTICAL industry influence over medical product regulation at the World Health Organisation (WHO) has been pushed back by governments.

The 67th World Health Assembly (WHA) that took place on 19-24 May adopted a resolution on regulatory system strengthening for medical products after dropping reference to regulatory harmonisation and the International Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH).

Set up in 1990, ICH brings together the regulatory authorities and pharmaceutical industries of Europe, Japan and the US 'to discuss scientific and technical aspects of drug registration' (see article below).

Its critics note that ICH in effect is a mechanism for the pharmaceutical industry to influence, even set, standards. 'Harmonisation' in this context is a code word for industry-led standard-setting which favours the interests of transnational pharmaceutical corporations by preventing competition from generic medicines.

The resolution had been proposed at the 134th meeting of the WHO Executive Board in January. It was a follow-up to the WHO secretariat report on regulatory system strengthening. There was no consensus at the Executive Board due to concerns from some developing countries and the draft resolution was forwarded with bracketed text to the WHA for health ministers to resolve.

At the WHA, developing countries such as India and China continued to express concern over harmo-



The World Health Assembly adopted a resolution on regulatory system strengthening for medical products after dropping reference to regulatory 'harmonisation', which is seen as code for industry-led standard-setting which favours the interests of transnational pharmaceutical corporations by preventing competition from generic medicines.

nisation and reference to ICH. India stated that their support for the resolution was based on a common understanding that the development of norms, standards or guidelines as per WHO principles is free from conflict of interest and excludes influence from any initiative driven by industry. China stressed national autonomy and independence in regulatory cooperation, and that harmonisation should be on a voluntary basis.

The removal of the words 'harmonisation and convergence' from the text of the resolution that was finally adopted clearly shows that there is a consensus among WHO member states to accept the concerns over regulatory harmonisation. Secondly, member states clearly expressed concerns with regard to the involvement of industry in WHO's regulatory norms and standard-setting.

The draft resolution that was

brought to the WHA from the Executive Board, in Operational Paragraph 1(f), had urged member states to 'implement relevant guidance and science-based outputs of international regulatory harmonisation and convergence efforts such as, where applicable, the Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use'. It further urged member states to promote international cooperation to promote 'convergence' (an indirect reference to harmonisation) in Operational Paragraph 1(3).

In Operational Paragraph 2(1), the resolution requested the WHO Director-General (D-G) to develop appropriate norms and standards, 'taking into account the standards created by existing regional and international initiatives'. Further, it asked the WHO D-G to promote the greater participation of member states in ex-

isting international and regional initiatives for collaboration, harmonisation and convergence in accordance with WHO principles and guidelines.

Four days of informal negotiations at the WHA led to the finalisation of the resolution. The resolution is believed to be an effort to further Global Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation (GMRH), an initiative by the World Bank. The World Bank is administering a multi-donor trust fund, which was established in 2011 with an initial contribution of \$12.5 million from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Gates Foundation).

According to the annual report of the GMRH published in 2013, the origins of the initiative go back to 2009: 'In 2009, a consortium of partners including the Pan African Parliament, NEPAD Agency, the World Health Organisation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, UK Department for International Development, and the Clinton Health Access Initiative came together to establish the African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation (AMRH) Programme.' With the help of Gates Foundation funding, 'it [was] possible for the World Bank to set up GMRH to implement AMRH and to scale up medicines regulatory harmonisation activities in Africa and beyond.'

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and ICH are believed to be important partners (see www.who.int/medicines/areas/policy/IPC_dec2012_Seiter_reg.pdf).

ICH plays an important role in the harmonisation process to determine the common minimum standards for medicine registration. ICH incorporated many of the harmonisation initiatives as part of its Global Cooperation Group (GCG).

Six Regional Harmonisation Initiatives of namely the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, Association of South-East Asian Nations, East African Community, Pan American Network for Drug Regulatory Harmonisation, Gulf Cooperation Council and the Southern African Development Community are part of ICH's GCG along with eight other drug regulatory authorities/departments of

health, namely Australia, Brazil, China, Chinese Taipei, India, the Republic of Korea, Russia and Singapore.

According to a paper by Ayelet Berman, a researcher who has worked extensively on ICH issues, the ICH standards 'have been to the detriment of entities, companies and countries that lack sufficient resources, and have advantaged resourceful companies and countries. In practice, this means that they have benefited larger, privately held, export-oriented companies, and have been to the detriment of smaller, locally oriented, or governmentally funded companies/entities'.

She further states that 'in certain contexts, they have promoted the commercial interests of the multinational pharmaceutical industry over the interests of patients in receiving much needed medicines or treatments'.

According to Berman, 'the [ICH] members are the main beneficiaries, non-members have been subject to distributional effects that are to their detriment'.

WHO's involvement in ICH activities raises serious concerns on conflict of interest with regard to WHO's role in the norms and standard-setting related to medicines.

The resolution adopted at the WHA amended Operational Paragraph 1(f) which originally urged WHO member states to strengthen national regulatory systems by, as appropriate, 'implementing relevant guidance and science-based outputs of international regulatory harmonisation and convergence efforts such as, where applicable, the Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use'.

The resolution dropped the words 'regulatory harmonisation and convergence efforts such as, where applicable, the Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use'. The amended text urges member states to strengthen national regulatory systems, including, as appropriate and voluntarily, by

'facilitating the use of relevant guidelines and science-based outputs of WHO expert committees and good regulatory practices at the national, regional and international levels'.

In paragraph 2(1), the indirect reference to ICH has been removed. The earlier draft requested the WHO D-G to continue to support countries in the area of regulatory system strengthening, 'including by developing appropriate norms and standards taking into account the standards created by existing regional and international initiatives'.

This is now reflected as new text in Operational Paragraph 2(2) that states: 'to continue to develop appropriate norms, standards and guidelines, including taking into account national, regional and international needs and initiatives in accordance with WHO principles'.

The words 'harmonisation and convergence' were removed from the draft paragraph 2(4) which originally stated: 'to promote the greater participation of Member States in existing international and regional initiatives for collaboration, harmonisation and convergence in accordance with WHO principles and guidelines'.

The amended text now placed as paragraph 2(5) states: 'to promote the greater participation of Member States in existing international and regional initiatives for collaboration and cooperation in accordance with WHO principles and guidelines'.

Similarly, paragraph 2(6) was also amended, removing the words 'harmonisation and convergence'. The draft text had originally read: 'to increase support for and recognition of the significant role of the International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities in promoting the exchange of information and collaborative approaches among drug regulatory authorities, and as a resource to guide and facilitate further development of, and regulatory harmonisation and convergence among, these authorities ...'.

The amended version clearly states: 'to increase support for and recognition of the significant role of the International Conference of Drug

Regulatory Authorities in promoting the exchange of information and collaborative approaches among drug regulatory authorities, and as a resource to facilitate further development of regulatory cooperation and coherence’.

Even though the resolution removed the reference to ICH and harmonisation, we have yet to see whether the WHO secretariat will make any concrete changes in its approach to regulatory harmonisation, taking into consideration the concerns expressed by member states including India and China.

Sceptics are of the view that without constant monitoring by member states, the secretariat is not going to change its approach. Even though the Assistant Director-General in charge of medical product regulation stated in a side event that the focus is on convergence and not on harmonisation, observers point out that these are different words with the same meaning.

Concerned observers cite the secretariat report to the WHA on regulatory system strengthening which clearly advocates regulatory harmonisation. It states: ‘In order to improve the regulation of medical products globally and ensure that the medical products that patients use are of assured quality, more emphasis needs to be placed on regulatory convergence and harmonisation, which offers numerous benefits to both regulatory authorities and the pharmaceutical industry, and which has a positive impact for the protection of public health. Stimulating and/or initiating collaboration between regulators from various countries on regulatory activities based on converging and harmonised technical standards is becoming more and more important.’

Another reason for the secretariat’s reluctance to move away from harmonisation emanates from WHO’s involvement in various harmonisation initiatives including at the international level (ICH and GMRH) and regional initiatives like the Pan American Network for Drug Regulatory Harmonisation and African Medicines Regulatory Harmonisation

initiative.

Further, some observers also point to the fact that even though the words ‘harmonisation’, ‘convergence’ and ‘ICH’ have been removed from the resolution, there are still indirect references to ICH and harmonisation efforts. This may be used by the secretariat to justify its current engagement with ICH and other harmonisation initiatives that may be problematic.

For instance, paragraph 1(f) asks countries to facilitate, as appropriate and voluntarily, the use of relevant guidance of WHO expert committees along with good practices at the national, regional and international levels. The words ‘international level’ may be used to justify the ongoing engagement with ICH and other harmonisation initiatives.

Similarly, paragraph 2(2) requests the D-G while developing ap-

propriate norms, standards and guidelines to take into account international needs and initiatives in accordance with WHO principles. Again the secretariat can justify its current approach, citing the mandate under this paragraph which allows the D-G to take into account international initiatives.

Yet again, paragraph 2(5) requests the D-G to promote greater participation of member states in the existing regional or international initiatives. Does this mean that WHO promotes the participation of member states in various medical product regulatory harmonisation initiatives, including the World Bank’s GMRH?

However, it may not be so easy for the secretariat to push for harmonisation and to continue its current level of engagement with ICH. Operational paragraph 2(2) does not provide a blanket mandate to the secre-

ICH: Serving Big Pharma’s interests?

KM Gopakumar

ICH was established in 1990 as a public-private partnership (PPP) primarily to lower the norms of registration (marketing approval) of new chemical entities. However, as shown below, increasingly ICH started setting standards to build a set of technical barriers to prevent competition from the generic medicine industry.

The founding members of ICH are the drug regulatory authorities of the European Union (European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products, EMEA), Japan (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, JMHLW) and the US (Food and Drug Administration, US FDA) and the research-based pharmaceutical industry associations of those countries (the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries’ Associations, EFPIA; the Japan Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Association, JPMA; and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America, PhRMA).

According to the ICH website, since its establishment in 1990, each

of its six co-sponsors (EMEA, EFPIA, JMHLW, JPMA, US FDA and PhRMA) has had two seats on the steering committee, the highest decision-making body of ICH. The three observers to the committee, which do not enjoy voting rights, are WHO, Health Canada (Canadian regulatory agency) and the European Free Trade Area. The International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers Associations (IFPMA), a federation of national associations of research-based pharmaceutical industry associations, is a non-voting member of the committee.

The ICH secretariat operates out of the Geneva office of IFPMA.

According to researcher Stephanie Dagon: ‘The steering committee oversees all activities. First, it determines the harmonisation activities to be pursued (i.e. initiative for guidelines and other instruments). Second, it adopts the guidelines and instruments that have been finalised and accepted by the parties through consensus. Third, it supervises the implementation and monitoring of ICH commitments. The IFPMA ex-

tariat to engage with ALL international initiatives. The D-G is to ensure that while taking into account international initiatives, it should be in accordance with WHO principles. As per the established WHO principles, there should not be any engagement with industry in norms and standard-setting. The ICH engagement is widely seen as being in conflict with WHO principles due to a conflict of interest between industry and WHO.

Member states which are concerned about the secretariat's activities in the area of regulatory system strengthening also have the opportunity for 'gatekeeping' to a certain extent through the Member State Mechanism. Operational Paragraph 2(11) of the resolution requests the D-G 'to ensure that any activity carried out under this resolution does not duplicate or circumvent the work plan

and mandate of the Member States mechanism on substandard/spurious/falsely-labelled/falsified/counterfeit medical products'. The Member State Mechanism identified strengthening of drug regulatory authorities as a priority in its work plan.

The removal of the words 'harmonisation and convergence' from the resolution clearly reflects the consensus among member states to accept the concerns over regulatory harmonisation and ICH as well as over the involvement of industry in WHO's regulatory norms and standard-setting.

The translation of the resolution into action now depends on the constant vigilance of the member states. ◆

KM Gopakumar is a senior researcher with the Third World Network. This article is reproduced from the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS, No. 7814, 2 June 2014).

lenges on the implementation of ICH guidelines.

Dagron notes: 'In 1999 the [ICH steering committee] created the Global Cooperation Group as a subcommittee, to allow the "participation" of representatives from non-ICH regions. In 2008, the [steering committee] also created a structure called the Regulators Forum. But these two structures do not offer any participation opportunities to their members within the elaboration process of the ICH guidelines. They only constitute platforms for discussion, information, and training. Their role is to allow the dissemination of ICH standards worldwide.'

According to the ICH website, representatives also listen to ICH technical topics discussed by the steering committee during meetings and are invited to nominate technical experts in Expert Working Groups/ Implementation Working Groups to contribute to the development of ICH guidelines. However, participation in the GCG is without any substantial say and without voting rights.

Imported into WHO norms

ICH, during the last 24 years, has worked as a partnership between the regulatory agencies of industrialised countries and pharmaceutical industry without any effective participation from developing countries and generic industries.

The important question is: how do regulatory agencies and WHO set norms in a body where the industry has a veto power through voting?

Thanks to the alliance with WHO, many ICH guidelines found a place in the reports of WHO's Expert Committee on Specifications for Pharmaceutical Preparations.

In other words, the norms and standards set by ICH without the participation of a substantial majority of WHO member states got imported into the WHO expert committee process and adopted as norms and standards for the regulation of medicines.

For instance, an annex to the 46th report of the Expert Committee on Specifications for Pharmaceutical



The US Food and Drug Administration is a founding member of ICH along with its EU and Japanese counterparts and these countries' respective research-based pharmaceutical industry associations.

ercises an important role since it provides the secretariat and participates...' (www.irpa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/IRPA.WP.2012.2.Dagron.pdf)

ICH's Global Cooperation Group (GCG) includes Regional Harmonisation Initiatives, namely, APEC, ASEAN, EAC, GCC, PANDRH and SADC, in addition to eight drug regu-

latory authorities/departments of health in Australia, Brazil, China, Chinese Taipei, India, the Republic of Korea, Russia and Singapore that are invited to the ICH bi-annual meetings.

The representatives of these organisations participate in the Global Cooperation session of the ICH steering committee to discuss capacity-building and share experience/chal-

Preparations, titled 'Pharmaceutical Development of Multisource (Generic) Finished Pharmaceutical Products – Points to Consider', is said to provide 'a structured approach for industry following the International Conference on Harmonisation (ICH) common technical document (CTD) format'.

The 44th report of the Expert Committee also contains WHO Good Manufacturing Practices for Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (API), which are based on the ICH guidelines.

It states: 'A major change to the analytical procedure, or in the composition of the product tested, or in the synthesis of the API, will require re-validation of the analytical procedure. Note: Further guidance on validation of analytical procedures is available in the following: Guideline elaborated by the International Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH).'

The ICH and IFPMA participate in the meetings of the WHO Expert Committee.

Commercial interests

Researchers also question the ICH claim that its guidelines are purely science-based. They point out that commercial and political interests play an important role in the finalisation of ICH guidelines.

A set of research papers shows that ICH has served the interests of transnational pharmaceutical corporations in two ways.

First, it set norms to lower the threshold level of technical requirements for the registration of medicines containing new chemical entities and new products obtained by biotechnology through harmonising the drug registration process.

Second, ICH started setting norms and standards for generic products and pharmaceutical substances (starting materials) and created a new entry barrier for small brandname and generic companies, especially those in developing countries.

Health researchers have warned against the drive for harmonisation.

In an article, Karin Timmermans writes: '... increasing the standards beyond the technological capacity of pharmaceutical companies in developing countries would effectively exclude their competitive generic products from the international market.'

Another researcher warns: 'The production of generics but also of pharmaceutical starting material in developing countries is endangered. In fact, ICH guidelines have introduced a tightening of specifications for pharmaceutical starting materials, which is not always justified by additional safety benefits. Another source of prohibitive costs for smaller companies is the Good Manufacturing Practice Guide for active pharmaceutical ingredients adopted by ICH in 2000.'

The same sentiment is expressed by an expert consultation organised by WHO in 2001.

The experts state: 'ICH has relied increasingly on advanced pharmaceutical technology in its standard setting, on the assumption that this technology will lead to greater safety of new drugs, while the ICH guidelines relating to drug quality have introduced a general tightening of specifications for pharmaceutical starting materials. For example, ICH guideline Q3A ("Impurities in new drug substances") includes the requirement that each organic impurity (whether identified or unidentified) present in a substance in the amount of 0.1% or more (in some cases 0.05% or more) should be considered as a qualified impurity (i.e. its safety should be established). This raises the question of the basis for the selection of the borderline figure, as the additional safety benefits from these rigorous standards have not been demonstrated but the costs incurred by manufacturers in meeting the requirements are significant.'

Further, the experts warn against making ICH norms global standards. Their report states: 'Setting such norms may have considerable repercussions on current manufacturing practices, as only pharmaceutical companies with substantial resources

can achieve the necessary standards. This is a concern if the guidelines are intended for global application. Smaller pharmaceutical companies, generic companies and many larger companies responsible for essential drug production in developing countries may be effectively squeezed out of drug manufacturing if ICH guidelines start to be interpreted as the only global standard.'

However, the experts recommended continuing WHO's engagement with ICH. 'WHO attends meetings of the ICH Steering Committee and the Global Cooperation Group as an observer. These roles are important and should be maintained. However, appropriate strategies for consultation and communication with Member States need to be developed to ensure that WHO is not seen as de facto automatically endorsing ICH products, but as providing advice on the potential impact of those products on non-ICH Member States.'

WHO has continued with the ICH process for some 24 years without the close scrutiny of member states because issues of norms and standards are considered as technical subjects; therefore, the World Health Assembly never deliberates the merits of the expert committee reports, which contain norms and standards for the regulation of medicines.

Meanwhile ICH adopts guidelines with political and economic considerations and successfully projects these guidelines as science-based and exports them to WHO expert committees. WHO's alliance with ICH facilitates this repackaging.

In the past, member states had forced WHO to discontinue its engagement with the International Medical Products Anti-Counterfeiting Taskforce (IMPACT) due to the latter's close association with the pharmaceutical industry.

The challenge at this point is for member states to scrutinise WHO's alliance with ICH and prevent any further conflict-of-interest situations. ♦

The above is extracted from an article which first appeared in the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS, No. 7807, 20 May 2014).

WHO and the Gates Foundation: Civil society groups register concern

WHO's invitation to Melinda Gates to address the 67th World Health Assembly as keynote speaker provoked protests from civil society groups. The following is the text of a statement issued by them at the WHA on 20 May.

WE the undersigned organisations express our strong protest against the decision of the World Health Organisation (WHO) to invite Melinda Gates (of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation – BMGF) as the keynote speaker at the 67th World Health Assembly, that began in Geneva on 19 May. This is the third time in the last 10 years that someone from the BMGF and of the family has been an invited speaker at the WHA (Melinda Gates was preceded by her husband Bill Gates, in 2005 and 2011). Ms. Melinda Gates' credentials as a leader in public health are unclear.

It is unacceptable that WHO, supposedly governed by sovereign nation states, should countenance that at its annual global conference, the keynote address would be delivered thrice in 10 years by individuals from the same private organisation, and from the same family.

The BMGF is the second largest funder of WHO. It has come to occupy this place over the past two decades, because of the freeze on assessed contributions by member states. Currently, 80% of WHO's finances come from voluntary contributions (including from countries and from private sources) and BMGF's funding is 'tied' to projects that the foundation has an interest in funding.

BMGF's munificence towards WHO as well as towards many other global health causes is well known. Less well known is the Foundation's internal policies that are clearly in conflict with global health.



Melinda Gates delivering the keynote address at the World Health Assembly.

BMGF's policies and practices are in conflict with global health

Despite the strong influence the BMGF exerts on global health policies, the effect of the policies it promotes has never been evaluated. This lack of accountability is based on the false premise that private foundations are not publicly accountable. This overlooks the fact that these foundations intervene in public life through political power they exert as a result of their financial clout; are publicly subsidised through tax exemptions; and reinforce the notion that inequity can be addressed through charity.

The Foundation's corporate stock endowment is heavily invested in the food industry (many of them under scrutiny for promoting unhealthy life-

styles), directly and indirectly. The Foundation holds significant shares in McDonald's (10 million shares – about 4% of the Gates' portfolio), and Coca-Cola (0.34 million shares, 14% of the Foundation's portfolio).

Previously it invested heavily in pharmaceutical companies. In 2009 it sold extensive pharmaceutical holdings in Johnson & Johnson (2.5 million shares), Schering-Plough Corporation (14.9 million shares), Eli Lilly and Company (about 1 million shares), Merck & Co. (8.1 million shares), and Wyeth (3.7 million shares).^{i, ii} Several people associated with the Foundation are currently or were previously members of the boards or executive branches of several major food and pharmaceutical companies, including Coca-Cola, Merck, Novartis, Pfizer, General Mills and Kraft.ⁱⁱⁱ

The blurring of the boundaries between the Foundation's objectives and its portfolio investment is evident in Foundation grants that encourage communities in developing countries to become business affiliates of Coca-Cola, in which the Foundation has substantial holdings. The Foundation held stock in Merck at a time when it developed partnerships with the African Comprehensive AIDS and Malaria Partnership and the Merck Company Foundation to test Merck products.

CSOs [civil society organisations] demand accountability from WHO

It is not possible, given the numerous conflict of interest issues that are at stake, to view the invitation to Ms Melinda Gates as a routine move. It would appear that the WHO Secretariat is more beholden to private donors than to the member states, that it is constitutionally mandated to serve.

We demand that:

- WHO draw up a transparent mechanism for inviting speakers to the WHA in future.
- WHO clarify the criteria based on which Melinda Gates has been invited to speak at the WHA.

We also urge Member States to take the lead in developing transparent and clear norms regarding such issues, and not leave the same to the discretion of the Secretariat. ◆

Notes

- <http://www.nasdaq.com/quotes/institutional-portfolio/bill-melinda-gates-foundation-trust-98131>
- David Stuckler, Sanjay Basu & Martin McKee (2011). Global Health Philanthropy and Institutional Relationships: How Should Conflicts of Interest Be Addressed? *PLoS Medicine*, 8
- ibid.

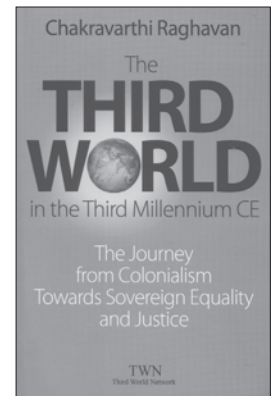
The Third World in the Third Millennium CE

The Journey from Colonialism Towards Sovereign Equality and Justice

By Chakravarthi Raghavan

The development path traversed by the countries of the Third World since emerging from the colonial era has been anything but smooth. Their efforts to attain effective economic sovereignty alongside political independence, even till the present day, face myriad obstacles thrown up on the global economic scene. This drive to improve the conditions of the developing world's population has seen the countries of the South seek to forge cooperative links among themselves and engage with the North to restructure international relations on a more equitable basis – not always with success.

In this collection of contemporaneous articles written over a span of more than three decades, *Chakravarthi Raghavan* traces the course of dialogue, cooperation and confrontation on the global development front through the years. The respected journalist and longtime observer of international affairs brings his inimitable blend of reportage, critique and analysis to bear on such issues as South-South cooperation, corporate-led globalization, the international financial system, trade and the environment-development nexus. Together, these writings present a vivid picture of the Third World's struggle, in the face of a less-than-conducive external environment, for a development rooted in equity and justice.



ISBN: 978-967-5412-83-7 368pp
14 cm x 21.5 cm Year: 2014

	Price	Postage
Malaysia	RM40.00	RM2.00
Developing countries	US\$13.00	US\$6.50 (air); US\$3.00 (sea)
Others	US\$18.00	US\$9.00 (air); US\$3.00 (sea)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order.
Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of: **THIRD WORLD NETWORK BHD.**, 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: twnet@po.jaring.my; Website: www.twn.my
Or visit our online bookstore at www.twnshop.com to order.

I would like to order copy/copies of *The THIRD WORLD in the Third Millennium CE: The journey from colonialism towards sovereign equality and justice*.

I enclose the amount of by cheque/bank draft/IMO.

Please charge the amount of US\$/Euro/RM to my credit card:

☐ American Express ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

A/c No.: Expiry date:

Signature:

Name:

Address:

South's leaders mark 50 years of G77

Developing countries' presidents and prime ministers held a summit in June to mark the 50th anniversary of the Group of 77 with a declaration on how to improve the world order and their own national development.



A summit of developing-country leaders was held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, in June to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Group of 77.

Martin Khor

POLITICAL leaders of developing countries gathered in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz on 14-15 June to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Group of 77, the main umbrella organisation of the South.

Presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers and ambassadors from a hundred countries celebrated the event with speeches and a declaration that pledged their continued fight for a fairer world order, but also to improve the condition of life of their people.

President Evo Morales of Bolivia, who hosted this G77 summit, gave a stirring speech enumerating nine key tasks that lie ahead for the developing world, and chaired the meeting of interesting reflections from leaders on what the South has achieved so far, the present crises and big challenges ahead.

A half-century of cooperation

On 15 June 1964, when most developing countries had just emerged from colonial rule, the officials of 77 developing countries met and issued a joint statement announcing the birth of the G77, at the first-ever meeting of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva.

In that historic statement, the developing countries pledged to promote equality in the international economic and social order and promote the interests of the developing world, declared their unity under a common interest and defined the Group as 'an instrument for enlarging the area of cooperative endeavour in the international field and for securing mutually beneficent relationships with the rest of the world'.

Fifty years later at Santa Cruz, the leaders affirmed that the developing countries need to unite under the G77

even more than before, as the global economy is in turmoil and the world order still remains imbalanced against their interests.

'We emphasise that the rationale for the establishment of our Group 50 years ago remains actual and valid, and indeed more valid, than at that time,' said their declaration.

'We therefore rededicate ourselves and our countries to strengthening and expanding the unwavering efforts of the Group of 77 and China in all fields towards greater achievement and for the betterment of the lives of our people.'

'The living-well society'

A highlight of the summit was the address by Bolivian President Morales, the current chairman of the G77, who traced the political history of the G77 and China and the developing countries and elaborated on the current crises facing the world and the developing countries.

He then enumerated 'several tasks' that needed to be done to 'build another world and establish the living-well society'. These included:

- Living well in harmony with Mother Earth;
- Sovereignty over natural resources and other areas;
- Well-being for everyone and provision of basic needs as a human right;
- Emancipation from the existing international financial system and construction of a new financial architecture;
- Build a major economic, scientific, technological and cultural partnership among members of the G77 and China;
- Eradicate hunger from around

the world;

- Strengthen the sovereignty of states from foreign interference, intervention and espionage;
- Democratic renewal of the states in developing countries; and
- A new world rising from the South for the whole of humankind.

‘The time has come for the nations of the South,’ Morales stated. ‘In the past we were colonised and enslaved. Today with every step we take for our liberation, the empires grow decadent and begin to crumble. However our liberation is not just the emancipation of the peoples of the South, it is also for the whole humanity.’

‘Only we can save the source of life and society, Mother Earth. Our planet is under a death threat ... Today another world is not only possible but indispensable. Today another world is indispensable because otherwise no world will be possible.’

‘And that world of equality, complementarity and organic coexistence with Mother Earth can only emerge from the thousands of languages, colours and cultures existing in brotherhood among the peoples of the South.’

Declaration

The summit adopted a 39-page declaration, a quite remarkable docu-



Bolivian President Evo Morales (centre), who chaired the G77 summit, elaborated on the current crises facing the world and the developing countries.

ment which encompasses the current state of thinking of leaders of the South half a century after the founding of their group.

As can be expected, the declaration summarises the G77 leaders' position on current international affairs, since the Group's main activity is to negotiate in multilateral and North-South settings in the United Nations.

This section sets out the developing countries' latest views on current themes such as the Sustainable Development Goals, the post-2015 development agenda, the global economic crisis, aid, debt, trade, reforming the international financial system, the role of the UN and increasing the

South's voice in global governance.

But the declaration also breaks new ground with a lengthy section on 'development in the national context', in which the political leaders pledged to improve the national development performance of their governments.

This is reflected in sections on economic issues (economic growth, industrialisation, infrastructure, agriculture) and the role of the state in ensuring basic services such as health and water for all citizens.

There are also sections on improving the practice of democracy, the environment including climate change, biodiversity and forests, and the need for the state to claim control and ensure the sovereignty of natural resources so that benefits can properly accrue to the national economy and society.

It was a fitting summit to mark the half-century of the G77's battles. Chief among its achievements were the UN Declarations on the New International Economic Order in 1974 and on the Right to Development in 1986, as well as other declarations in the many UN summits of the 1990s and after.

The battles ahead, both for national development and for a better world order, are even more important. ♦

Martin Khor is Executive Director of the South Centre, an intergovernmental policy think-tank of developing countries, and former Director of the Third World Network.



On 15 June 1964, at the first-ever meeting of the UN Conference on Trade and Development in Geneva, the officials of 77 developing countries met and issued a joint declaration announcing the birth of the G77.

The revival of the movement of non-aligned countries

Though it emerged in the 1960s, the non-aligned movement is still relevant today because it opposed the unjust international order which we today call 'globalisation'. *Samir Amin* explains.

IF the repeated discourse of the Western media is to be believed, the idea of the revival of non-alignment is unrealistic. According to that discourse, all that happened in the world between 1945 and 1990 can be explained merely by the 'Cold War' and nothing else. The Soviet Union disappeared and the page of the Cold War has been turned, and any posture analogous to what we have known has no meaning.

Let us examine the ineptitude of this discourse and its incredibly dismissive prejudice – nay, even racism. What is its basis? The real story of Bandung and non-alignment that arose from it showed that the peoples of Asia and Africa actually seized at the time an initiative by themselves and for themselves. The reader will find in what I have written a demonstration that non-alignment was already a movement of countries non-aligned on globalisation, in contrast to the globalisation that the imperialist powers wanted to impose on countries that had regained their independence, substituting the deceased colonialism with a neocolonialism.

Refusal to comply

Non-alignment constituted a refusal to comply with the requirements of this renewed imperialist globalisation. Imperialism won the battle, for the moment at least. Non-alignment was, therefore, itself a positive factor in the transformation of the world for the better, despite all its limitations. The Soviet Union understood at the time the benefits it could derive through its support for the non-aligned, especially because the Soviet Union was also in conflict with the dominant system of globalisation, and



The Non-Aligned Movement had its genesis in the Asia-Africa Conference (pic) held in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. 'The real story of Bandung ... showed that the peoples of Asia and Africa actually seized at the time an initiative by themselves and for themselves.'

suffered from the isolation into which the Atlantic powers locked it. Moscow realised that by supporting the non-aligned it could break this isolation. In contrast, the imperialist powers fought against non-alignment because it was not 'aligned' to globalisation.

Call it 'Bandung 2' if you like. Of course 'the world has changed' since then (this observation reveals its extreme banality). Thus the new imperialist globalisation is not a copy of the one that Bandung faced. The discourse that reduces non-alignment to an avatar of the Cold War reflects a persistent prejudice in the West: the peoples of Asia and Africa were unable to drive the initiative on their own then, and they are no more capable of doing so now. They are doomed forever to be manipulated by the major powers (primarily Western of course).

This contempt barely conceals a profound racism. As if the Algerians,

for example, had taken up arms to please Moscow, or perhaps Washington, and they had been manipulated to this end by certain leaders who had chosen to play a game of playing one power against another. No, their decision stemmed from their just desire to be free of colonialism, the form that globalisation took in that era. And when they implemented their own decisions, the battleground is drawn between those who supported the struggles and those who opposed them. That is the reality of history.

1. We live in an unbalanced globalisation, unequal and unjust.

Some have exclusive rights to access all the resources of the planet for their own use or even to waste. For others, their obligation is to accept this order and adjust their own requirements, even to give up their own development, waive their rights to basic food, education, health, life itself for large segments of their peo-

ple – our people. This unjust order is called ‘globalisation’.

We should even accept that the beneficiary powers of this unjust world order, mainly the United States, the European Union and associated military partners in NATO, have the right to intervene by force of arms to enforce their abusive rights to use – even to pillage – our own wealth. They do so using various pretexts – the war against terrorism when it suits them. But the facts show that in neither Iraq nor Libya, for example, did their intervention help restore democracy. On the contrary, their interventions have simply destroyed the states and societies concerned. They did not open the way to progress and democracy, but rather closed it.

Our movement could be called the Non-Aligned Movement on Globalisation. We are not opponents to all forms of globalisation. We are opponents of this unjust form of globalisation in which we are the victims.

2. The responses we want to give to this challenge are simple to formulate in terms of their major principles.

We have the right to choose our own path of development. The powers that were and are the beneficiaries of the existing order should accept adjusting themselves to the requirements of our development. The adjustment must be mutual, not unilateral. That is, it is not the weak who have to adjust to the strong, but rather the strong need to adjust to the needs of the weak. The legal principle should be designed to redress injustices, not to perpetrate them. We have the right to implement our own sovereign development projects. We reject the tenets of globalisation that are currently in place.

Our sovereign development project must be designed to enable our nations and our states to industrialise as they see fit, in the legal and social structures of their choice, those that allow us to capture and develop ourselves with modern technologies.

These must be designed to ensure food sovereignty and allow all strata of our people to be the beneficiaries

of development, halting ongoing processes of impoverishment.

The implementation of our sovereign projects requires us to regain our financial sovereignty. It is not up to us to adjust to the financial plunder for the benefit of the banks of the dominant economic powers. The global financial system must itself be forced to adjust to the implications of our sovereignty.

It is up to us to define the ways and means of developing South-South cooperation that can facilitate the success of our sovereign development projects.

3. Our movement can and must act within the United Nations to restore their rights violated by the unjust globalisation order.

At present a so-called ‘international community’ has proclaimed itself as a replacement of the UN. Media of dominant powers keep repeating that the ‘international community’ believes this or that, decides this or that. Looking more closely, we discover that the ‘international community’ they refer to is made up of the United States, the European Union and two or three handpicked countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Is there anything more seriously insulting to our people than this self-proclamation? China, Algeria, Egypt, Senegal, Angola, Venezuela, Brazil, Thailand, Russia, Costa Rica and many other countries apparently no longer exist. They no longer have the right to make their voices heard in the international community. Yes, we bear a great responsibility in the UN environment where we are a major group. But this requires the restoration of the rights of the UN, the only acceptable framework for the expression of the international community.

4. We can now take a look at our past, which provides us a great lesson about what we once were and what we should be again.

The Non-Aligned Movement was formed in 1960 in the path opened by the Bandung Conference of 1955. It sought to assert the rights of our peoples and nations of Asia and Africa which had not then been recognised

as being worthy of being partners in the reconstruction of a new world order. Our movement was not the by-product of conflict between the two major powers of the time – the USA and the USSR – and the ‘Cold War’, as many try to make us believe.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Asia and Africa were still largely subjected to odious colonialism. Our people were engaged in powerful struggles to regain our independence by peaceful means or by means of liberation war if necessary. Having regained our independence and restored the existence of our states, we found ourselves in conflict with the world order that was sought to be imposed on us at the time. Our movement of non-aligned countries then proclaimed our right to choose our route to development, implemented laws and forced the powers of the time to adjust to the demands of our development.

Certain powers at the time accepted it. Others did not. Western powers – the United States and the countries of what would become the European Union, already involved in NATO since 1949 – have never hidden their hostility to our own project of independent development. They fought us by all means at their disposal. Other powers, the USSR first, chose a different path for us. They accepted and even supported the positions of the movement of non-aligned countries. The military power that the USSR represented during that era in effect limited the possibilities of aggression by those nostalgic for colonialism and consistently ardent supporters of the unjust international order.

We can therefore say that even if the world today is no longer that of 1960 – a banal and obvious observation – the movement of non-aligned then was already a movement of countries non-aligned on globalisation, the globalisation they wanted to impose on us at the time. ♦

Samir Amin is director of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal. This article is reproduced from the Global Research website (www.globalresearch.ca). © Samir Amin 2014

The seismic shifts behind the coup in Thailand

To understand the crisis in Thailand, it is important to understand the momentous changes Thai society has undergone in recent decades, says *Grant Evans*.

THAILAND has been in crisis since an armed forces coup overthrew Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in September 2006, ultimately forcing him into exile. Although his opponents used fair means and foul to keep various incarnations of Thaksin's party out of power, his sister Yingluck Shinawatra became Thailand's first female prime minister following a resounding electoral victory for Thaksin's Pheu Thai (For Thai) party in 2011.

But Yingluck's government started to unravel in 2013 when it attempted a mass amnesty for those charged with corruption or other crimes. It was clear the amnesty was designed to allow Thaksin to return from exile. Opposition to the government surged, further fuelled by the failure of a populist rice-subsidy scheme that not only provided opportunities for corruption but also proved so costly that the government couldn't honour its payments. Yingluck faces corruption charges over the scheme.

On 7 May, the Constitutional Court removed Yingluck from office for her role in trying to install the brother of Thaksin's former wife as police chief. She pleaded, disingenuously, that he was no longer family. The divorce was a political convenience, of course, and Yingluck's manoeuvre shows just how ingrained oligarchic politics is in Thailand.

In the end, the evolving crisis led to another coup on 22 May. Intriguingly, it has met with much less opposition than anyone expected.

To understand the crisis in Thai politics, it's important to examine the momentous changes Thai society has undergone in recent decades. If certain key institutions, such as the monarchy, have not yet been transformed, then they are about to be. Old relationships have been destabilised; new



Opponents of the May coup in Thailand. The coup-makers now face a complex modern society.

ones are not yet in place. It is this setting – the perfect opening for a populist demagogue like Thaksin – that explains much more about contemporary Thailand than the grossly simplified image of a struggle between the 'rural poor' and the urban middle class and elites.

I have been watching events unfold from neighbouring Laos, a perfect observation point. Thailand's northeast region, just across the border, accounts for 31% of the total population. Commonly called Isan (and its people, Khon Isan), the region is mostly ethnic Lao, and has been a major base of support for Thaksin. According to anthropologist Charles Keyes, the region's ethno-regional identity and solidarity has made the local people into a formidable political force. But, as Keyes also shows, Isan has been transformed out of sight since he first visited 50 years ago.

When Keyes and his wife Jane went to central Isan in 1963-64 it was still the poorest region in Thailand. Self-sufficient peasants battled with irregular rainfall and poor soils to make ends meet. The local geography conspired against commercial agriculture, and so men had begun heading

to Bangkok for work in construction or other menial jobs, especially during the dry season. When Thailand became a playground for US troops on leave from the war in Vietnam, women headed to the urban bars and brothels for work. American aid drove roads through the region and sped up the circulation of people between city and countryside. Drawn out of their rural isolation, the migrants came into contact with others like themselves from across Isan, fomenting an ethno-regional sentiment. Together, they became aware of the wealth differences between Isan and Bangkok.

For residents of Bangkok, many of whom were of Sino-Thai descent, these dark, short-statured people in simple clothing were *ban nok*, 'country bumpkins' whose dialect was crude to their ears. When TV came along, they became the fall guys in Thai comedies, and in everyday life they had to suffer the contempt of those above them.

Keyes describes how the people of this region became Thai through an expansion of the national bureaucracy, the centralising of the Buddhist *sangha*, and especially – since the 1930s – schools that educated both boys and girls. They learnt to use the central Thai language and its various polite forms and, especially from the 1950s on, they learned to love the Thai king, Bhumibol Adulyadej. Essentially, it was good old-fashioned nation building, and similar processes occurred for every region, including Bangkok, where the Chinese, for instance, needed to be turned into Thais.

Migration in search of work, especially overseas, transformed the lives of Isan's peasants to the point where they became rural entrepreneurs. 'By the early twenty-first century,' writes Keyes, 'non-agricultural work had become the most significant

source of cash income for villagers. The money villagers brought back from urban or overseas work was increasingly invested not in agriculture but in small enterprises such as convenience stores, repair shops, and food stalls as well as rice mills.' Importantly, it was also used to pay for higher education for children, of whom there were fewer now that women were embracing birth control.

Thaksin's power base is in the north, around Chiang Mai, where the conditions suited full-scale commercial farming. This, too, caused migration from the countryside to the city and upward mobility through education. The north's ethno-regional identity is strong – they are known as Khon Muang – but because their aristocracy had been seamlessly absorbed by the Siamese state they are not looked down on like the people of Isan. Indeed, Thai soap operas are more likely to romanticise old northern aristocratic life and emulate its speech forms.

In one sense, what had been forming in the Thai countryside by the time of Thaksin's rise in the late 1990s was a rural entrepreneurial class determined to better their lives and sweep away any bureaucratic obstacles. Thaksin the mega-entrepreneur played to this audience perfectly, and his million-baht-per-village loan scheme, alongside cheap universal healthcare, won him unwavering support. The majority of pro-Thaksin activists in the Red Shirt movement are in their 40s or older – exactly the group that has made the transition from scarcity to having tasted the good life. Big, shiny cars are now ubiquitous on Isan's highways; as one Red Shirt follower said, 'We are not going back to riding motorcycles.'

This doesn't quite fit with journalistic clichés about the 'rural poor'. In the same way, bland assertions about the 'Bangkok middle class' blur the changing urban landscape.

As its skyline shows, Bangkok has been remade since 1980 by dramatic economic growth. The city's workforce has diversified and middle-class occupations have grown steeply. Labour shed by agriculture has flowed into manufacturing, where the

workforce grew from 14% of the total in 1990 to 20% in 2008. But white-collar work grew even faster – from one in five employees to almost one in three – and within its ranks professionals and senior white-collar workers grew fastest.

Even in Keyes's rural village, 17% of children in 2005 had gone on from high school to vocational colleges or (in 4% of cases) to university, and 22% had finished high school. Because most of them sought white-collar jobs, often in the capital, migrants played an important role in the growth of the middle class in Bangkok. Many are upwardly mobile, socially and culturally, and have learned to speak flawless central Thai. They dress for and aspire to an affluent urban lifestyle. An important indicator of the dislocations involved in cultural change, however, is the fact that the Bangkok metropolitan area has one of the highest non-marriage rates for women in their 20s and 30s of any city in South-East Asia.

For these upwardly mobile new members of the middle class, the plebeian style adopted by the Red Shirts is exactly what they are running away from. Of course, many of them aren't politically active, but others have joined the anti-Thaksin forces because they agree with the middle-class critique of the government corruption epitomised by the Thaksin years. No doubt these migrants are part of the reason why the Thai press speaks of bitter divisions in families over politics.

Over this same period, Thailand's elite has also changed radically. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 hit Thailand especially hard, sending many old business families to the wall. The boom years had been built on major inflows of foreign investment and a globalised economy. Close relations with the Thai state had once provided local capitalists with very comfortable incomes, but now globalisation had destabilised the cosy arrangements. In fact, Thaksin's wealth in the telecommunications sector had initially been built on a deal that gave him a monopoly. Yet he was part of a new breed of Thai capitalists who thought glo-

bally and aimed to take over the government and run the state as if it were a business. As Pasuk Phongpaichit and Chris Baker write in their superb biography, 'Thaksin's project was built around a fatal confusion – between business and politics, country and company, Shin Corp and Thailand. Throughout his career, politics and profit-making were entwined around one another like a pair of copulating snakes.' After the election of his Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai) party in January 2001, Thaksin's already rich business and family network went into a feeding frenzy.

The monarchy

The monarchy, headed by enigmatic King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is also about to change irreversibly. A conservative who believes in rule by righteous individuals, the king has done deals with military dictators to strengthen the monarchy but has never been a thug himself. His preference, as much as one can discern it, is for a form of guided democracy. He has been an enormously popular and respected figure for many decades. But he became physically enfeebled just as the political turmoil began, and the Queen has since been crippled by a stroke, and so now the royal couple are marionettes of the Privy Council.

The heir, Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn, has none of his father's political talent or charisma. He is believed to have had dealings with Thaksin, although it is unclear what these amount to. In late November last year, according to the *Economist*, 'the King signed a decree mandating that all decisions by the powerful defence council were subject to veto by the Crown Prince', but whether Vajiralongkorn really wields this power is moot. With the passing of King Bhumibol, the personalised networks that have been spun around him for so long will unravel and Vajiralongkorn will find himself presiding over a weakened monarchy. It will be a big blow for conservatives.

For many Thais the monarchy evokes a stable social hierarchy in an increasingly unpredictable world. But

as society diverges from this ideal a kind of reactionary nostalgia has gripped many people – as can be seen in the Yellow Shirt movement. In reality, the social changes have led to seismic shifts in how people perceive their relationship to authority. Thailand has been transformed into a commercialised society of strangers – entrepreneurial farmers in the countryside, workers flocking into the factories and dormitory suburbs, the *nouveaux riches* flaunting their wealth in city nightclubs – and all these people, millions upon millions of them, can't be slotted into the old framework. They had no intention of breaking the old status system down; they were just seizing whatever opportunity for betterment the new Thailand offered. But break down the old system they did. All across the social spectrum demands for equality are heard.

Thaksin's fatal mistake was to alienate the old military elite, which saw him as challenging the moral and political authority of the now visibly ageing king. There is little doubt that the 2006 coup was masterminded by the head of the Privy Council, retired general Prem Tinsulanond. But he and the other generals, unlike old coup-makers who had to deal only with a sea of peasants and a state-centred economic system they were capable of running, now found that Thailand's modern economy and society had grown too complex for them. They failed not only the democracy test, but also the task of managing the economy and society. It was a sobering lesson for the armed forces, and perhaps General Prayuth Chan-ocha, the leader of the latest coup, has learnt from their mistakes.

After the 2006 coup the bloc of old capitalists, at the centre of which was the now enormously wealthy Crown Property Bureau, was joined by businessmen alienated by Thaksin's winner-take-all style, along with the armed forces and many in the middle class, to form the core of the forces arraigned against Thaksin. Some capitalists who had joined the Thaksin bandwagon found themselves frozen out of contracts, and by

the time of his ouster considerable disgruntlement had emerged in his camp. Had the coup not happened, Thai Rak Thai may have come apart at the seams.

The coup-makers faced a population that no longer buckled before a show of force. The Red Shirts – more formally the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship, or UDD – formed immediately after the coup. They organised anti-government rallies against the military government's rule in 2006-07 and opposed the military's 2007 constitution. After the Democrat Party's Abhisit Vejjajiva was installed as prime minister, the UDD led major anti-government rallies in April 2009 and March-May 2010, resulting in violent clashes with military forces and casualties on all sides. They responded with arson in the capital and against government buildings in rural Thailand. I happened to be in Bangkok at the time, and travelling through streets littered with abandoned barricades of smouldering tyres and burnt-out shops and malls was eerie. No one wishes to see a repeat of it.

Liberal institutions

What has been out of focus in the discussion about democracy in Thailand, however, is the 'liberal' part of the liberal-democratic equation. In many respects, 19th-century liberal fears of majoritarian rule seem to have come true. A 'people's constitution' of 1997 had strengthened liberal institutions by increasing the powers of the National Counter Corruption Commission, or NCCC, and by creating the first-ever Constitutional Court. Accused of concealing assets by the NCCC, Thaksin quickly revealed that he had few liberal sympathies. 'It's strange that the leader who was voted in by eleven million people had to bow to the ruling of the NCCC and the verdict of the Constitutional Court,' he opined in August 2001, 'two organisations composed of only appointed commissioners and judges, whom people do not have a chance to choose.'

The extrajudicial killings that fol-

lowed Thaksin's crackdown on drug crime, and the violent suppression of southern Muslim separatists that set off an unabated insurgency, illustrated his knee-jerk authoritarianism. In his more considered moments, Thaksin favoured the creation of a dominant-party state, like that of the People's Action Party in Singapore. He was seeking power for the rest of his life.

Followers of the Red Shirts appear to have little comprehension, or perhaps sympathy, for liberal checks and balances. They simply insist that a majority at the ballot box gives the elected government unrestricted powers. It is a winner-take-all mentality that their leaders have encouraged.

Liberal institutions have also been undermined by opponents of Thaksin. First, the 2006 coup-makers, and then the appointed government led by the Democrat Party, manipulated these institutions to disband Thai Rak Thai (which, after one incarnation, re-emerged as Pheu Thai), and disqualified many of its politicians for five years. Suggestions by Yellow Shirt leaders that leading judges are beholden to the king rather than the constitution are plainly illiberal. Moreover, an alarming number of intellectuals have articulated reactionary, elitist solutions to the crisis that would disenfranchise Thaksin's supporters, using the canard that their votes have been bought and accusing them of being ignorant peasants.

One final problem is the oligarchic nature of Thai politics. Political parties are the creatures of their rich owners. So Pheu Thai belongs to Thaksin and is run largely by him and his family. The aim in holding political power is to enhance one's wealth and pork-barrel handouts for the party's followers. The oldest party, the Democrat Party, is the closest Thailand has to a modern political party, but its conservatism and its failure to reach out to people in the north and northeast have crippled it electorally. This failure of the party system is crucial for understanding the current impasse. It would be a major step forward for democracy if the Red Shirts abandoned Pheu Thai and established

a popular political party with a genuine political platform.

Parties have continued their existence since the coup, but stories have circulated of rifts within both Pheu Thai and the Democrat Party. The extreme wing of Pheu Thai have called for violent resistance to the coup. Moderates, however, many with large bank accounts that can be frozen, have chosen a wait-and-see approach. Thaksin himself has laid very low as he and his family have extensive assets in Thailand. No doubt, when family members were called in by the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) they were reminded how easy it would be to freeze them.

As for the Red Shirts, several extremist leaders are on the run, but seem rather isolated. Radicals like Arisman Pongruangrong, a former pop singer made infamous by a speech in 2010 calling for Bangkok to be burnt to the ground, have reported to the coup council. An army source said afterwards that Arisman was ready to help compose a song to promote unity and reconciliation... Armed Red Shirt groups were quickly suppressed, and the army's crackdown on the possession of war weapons has swept up several substantial caches – not all related to the political conflict. As for the more moderate leaders among the Red Shirts, they have simply gone underground. Meanwhile, villages that declared themselves 'Red' have had to remove all signs of 'divisiveness'.

The response of the Red Shirts to the coup has been more quiescent than anyone predicted. With the political ball now up in the air, they may, however, emerge from the current period with a new strategy.

As for divisions within the Democrat Party, they have been fomented by supporters of former Democrat leader Suthep Thaugsuban, who formed the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC) in 2013 to bring down the Yingluck government. The illiberal and undemocratic programme of this movement appealed to conservatives in the party. Moderates, however, seem to have clung to some semblance of liberalism. A conservative split can only help the Democrats.

The 'reluctant coup-maker'

Not only have rural people 'found their voices', in Keyes's words, but Thai society itself is now a cacophony of voices. It is a complex modern society that is a far cry from a world of stable hierarchies and benevolent kings. Does a royalist conservative like General Prayuth understand this? The junta's propaganda about restoring social harmony and galvanising everyone to work for the nation suggests that older dreams live on. Concerts for reconciliation, reconciliation meetings between opposing sides in some areas, and strictures against 'divisiveness' seem somewhat naïve. But, there is also an element to the message that says, 'Reconcile, or else.'

Prayuth himself has emerged as a bit of a puzzle, because the 'reluctant coup-maker' seems to have large ambitions for Thailand. So far he has been realistic and pragmatic.

One of his first deft moves was to see that farmers shortchanged by Yingluck's rice scheme were paid. The curfew has now been lifted across the country, and the Thai people have been treated to free World Cup football. But these populist gestures will stop. In particular, there will be no continuation of the rice-pledging scheme. Indeed, as this goes to press, the army has locked down rice warehouses across the northeast to begin an investigation into the corruption associated with the scheme. The NCPO has also gone after other graft, such as transport mafias and loan rackets. Furthermore, a decree on land reform that has been stuck in parliament because members on both sides are substantial landholders, is being activated. All of this is clearly popular. A somewhat biased poll by Suan Dusit that asked 'what has made people truly happy during the three weeks' since the coup, produced this response: political stability, normalcy, and moves against corruption.

Prayuth sometimes seems to have his own agenda. He has called for a cleaning up of the Buddhist *sangha* where scandal after scandal, he says, has led to a loss of respect for monks. But, the *sangha* has also been polarised by political events, so reform will

not be easy.

He appears to understand that soldiers are ill-equipped to run a modern economy and society and has gathered experts around him to formulate policy and political reform. A major review of a very lucrative major transport plan for the country has seen it scaled down from 3 trillion baht to 2.4 trillion. The high-speed railway component has been dumped. Indeed, a little old-style economic nationalism shone through in Prayuth's remarks: 'It's been said [by Yingluck] that the electric [high-speed] train lines would be built for free [by China]. I would like to ask if there is anything free in this world. You should ask yourselves whether you can accept a 50-year concession that would see more than 100,000 workers being brought to the country and the constructor insisting on land along the route for development.' Just who gets the contracts will be concentrating the minds of many of Thailand's big capitalists.

Prayuth has promised an interim government by August or September and a temporary constitution should be drafted by then. 'In the next three months we must do everything properly, whether it is the constitution or other matters. Everything for the first phase should be complete by August,' Prayuth, ever the commander, has said.

We will then see if any attempts are made to curtail the political rights of the people of Isan or the north. If the NCPO and its constitutional drafters are silly enough to try, they can be sure of an even bigger crisis in the future. ♦

Grant Evans is a senior research fellow in anthropology at the École Française d'Extrême-Orient, Vientiane, Laos. For many years he was a professor of anthropology at the University of Hong Kong. His books have focused on Laos; from peasant studies to 'royal studies', political ritual and memory, and, more generally, Lao history. On the region; an early book with Kelvin Rowley, Red Brotherhood at War; a collection, Where China Meets Southeast Asia; and Hong Kong: The Anthropology of a Chinese Metropolis, edited with Maria Tam. Several books have been translated into Asian languages, including Asia's Cultural Mosaic: An Anthropological Introduction.

The above is reproduced from The Asia-Pacific Journal (Vol. 11, Issue 25, No. 1, 23 June 2014, japanfocus.org). It is an expanded and updated version of an article that appeared in Inside Story (inside.org.au).

Sisiphus

The election in May of 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi as Egypt's President was no surprise, coming as it did in the wake of a massive wave of repression. However, he has little assurance of stability as the foundation on which his regime rests will make it impossible for him to address the serious economic woes of his country.

Andrea Teti, Vivienne Matthies-Boon and Gennaro Gervasio

OVER three days in late May, 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi, the retired field marshal and former head of military intelligence, was elected president of Egypt with 96% of the vote. This tally was far higher than the 51.34% recorded in 2012 by the man Sisi helped to depose, Muhammad Mursi, and higher than the 88.6% racked up by Hosni Mubarak in the rigged contest of 2005. Since the only other candidate, Hamdin Sabbahi, scarcely disagreed with Sisi on matters of policy during the campaign, a Sisi victory was a foregone conclusion, even if the margin was not.

Sisi's main objective was to outpoll Mursi so as to lend an air of legitimacy and popular approval to the ouster of the Muslim Brother some 11 months earlier. Among those who voted for the ex-general, indeed, there were certainly many who hope that he will bring a measure of stability to a country that is economically as well as politically exhausted by three years of turmoil. The lavish inauguration ceremony and tumultuous Tahrir Square celebration on 8 June brought these voters out in the hundreds of thousands. It is far from clear, however, that stability is what Sisi voters will get: The foundations upon which the reconfigured regime rests make it impossible for the new president to address Egypt's fundamental social and economic problems, leaving the regime brittle if not necessarily fragile.

A marked contrast

Egypt's first democratic presidential election, held in May 2012, set



Campaign posters of 'Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi adorn the streets ahead of the May presidential polls. Sisi's eventual election took place amidst increasing repression in Egypt.

an important precedent by which Sisi's anointment will eventually be measured. At the time, there was no constitution, no clarity on the president's powers and no process of transitional justice. There had been no overhaul of the state security agencies and no reform of economic policy. Key demands of the 2011 revolution, like inclusive economic growth and social justice, were conspicuously unfulfilled. There was, however, plenty of political participation. Though voter fatigue had already set in, turnout was 43.4%.

For all its flaws, the presidential election was a free, largely fair and surprisingly close-run affair: The top four candidates in the first round finished within 7% of one another, while in the runoff the two candidates were separated by a mere 3.5% of the vote. While the victor, Mursi, could claim only a slender margin of victory over his rival Ahmad Shafiq, all Egyptians hopeful about a transition towards democracy could take heart from the integrity of the process itself.

The 2014 election could not contrast more markedly with the 2012 contest. Sisi's election took place amidst increasing repression, and politicians had trouble convincing even their own supporters to cast votes in a race whose outcome many regarded as predetermined.

Officials were adamant that turnout topped 30% by the afternoon of 27 May, despite reports of deserted polling stations. Their confidence was transparent bravado. In order to persuade Egyptians to enter voting booths, the second day of balloting was declared a state holiday, train fares were suspended to allow convenient travel and a fine of 500 Egyptian pounds was imposed for failing to show up. The regime-friendly media did its part, with TV anchors castigating non-voters in lurid terms. Some presenters went so far as to say, 'Any woman who goes shopping instead of voting should be shot or shoot herself.' At the end of day two, the Presidential Election Committee suddenly decided to extend the election

through 28 May, arguing that hot weather had deterred would-be voters. This more-than-faint desperation heightened concerns about public participation, not to mention the reliability of official election data. In the meantime, Sabbahi and opposition parties such as Dustour withdrew their election monitors, saying that the observers had been assaulted, banned from entering polling stations and referred to military investigators.

The low turnout has to concern the regime that Sisi represents. It is a blow to the perceived legitimacy of the July 2013 coup against Mursi and the Muslim Brothers. Back then, the Tamarrud (Rebellion) movement had collected signatures and filled squares with Mursi opponents from a variety of political backgrounds. The groundswell allowed the army to claim that it was acting in the name of the people. This claim, always tendentious, now looks shakier than ever.

Voter fatigue certainly contributed; the 2014 presidential election was the sixth time in four years that Egyptians have been called to the polls, with no clear end to the post-Mubarak transition in sight. The certainty of the outcome did not help, either. But the self-inflicted wound was the harsh repression of any opposition, secular or Islamist, in the months following Mursi's ouster. Ahmad Mahir, co-founder of the pro-democracy April 6 movement, and leftist and liberal activists like Alaa Abdel Fattah and Mahienour al-Masry have spent time in prison and faced torture under a draconian new protest law. (Al-Masry is still in jail.) Predictably, a range of non-Islamist opposition groups boycotted the voting.

To be sure, the blow is not fatal, but it is ironic that the army's coup and subsequent clampdown may have resurrected the Muslim Brothers' reputation. The Brothers' own authoritarian behaviour when in power sent their popularity, and their credibility as democratic actors, into steep decline. Now, the Brothers' forcible removal from office and subsequent persecution by the state has allowed them to present themselves as paladins of democratic process. Indeed, if



Protesters stage a demonstration in Cairo on the first anniversary of the July 2013 coup against President Muhammad Mursi. It has been estimated that since the coup, security forces have detained more than 41,000 people.

the army's indiscriminate repression continues, Islamists, leftists, liberals and others may find incentives to form a common front against the regime once more.

Strings attached

What the 2014 election suggests is that Sisi and his army-led regime do not have unconditional popular support. Sisi's numerous backers can be broken down into several constituencies, ranging from Mubarak-era holdovers (*fuloul*) aiming to retain their privilege to nationalists fearful of Islamism to those hit hard by economic instability. The last category includes many poor Egyptians and those segments of the middle class whose fortunes declined under Mubarak's privatisation schemes and who now crave recovery of their purchasing power. Some of the pro-Sisi forces – primarily the security forces, entrenched state bureaucrats and elites so anti-Islamist they are almost Islamophobic – can be relied upon. The allegiance of other strata, however, particularly the poor and the impoverished middle classes, is likely to depend on the new chief executive's performance both in restoring stability and in bringing better economic times.

The post-Mubarak era, indeed, has seen the popularity of various political actors wax and wane. The

army was feted in February 2011 for its role in removing Mubarak, but by November of that year public opinion had turned against the generals, forcing them to permit fair parliamentary and presidential elections. In December 2012, Muhammad Mursi awarded himself sweeping powers (most of which he never used) and confidently put up a controversial constitution for approval by plebiscite. And yet by the succeeding summer he had been shoved aside in a coup backed by a majority of Egyptians.

The Sisi regime's perch is more precarious still. Egypt's predicament is rooted first and foremost in its dire economic straits, but neither the armed forces nor other core components of the new regime have promising ideas on this front. Indeed, Reuters reported on 6 June that the regime has enlisted American consulting firms to broker a rapprochement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whose neoliberal recommendations Mursi could not stomach, knowing their contribution to Mubarak's downfall. The Gulf states that have bankrolled the post-Mursi regimes are pushing the IMF option as a way to curtail their own cash infusions into Egypt.

Second, the regime has made heavy use of propaganda. But propaganda only goes so far before the expectations it raises come back to haunt

its authors. Indeed, already the pro-army media is showing signs of caution in its fawning over Sisi. These outlets helped to concoct a cult of personality with a bewildering iconography ranging from Sisi cakes to Sisi lingerie. Now, the same media try to dampen expectations of the saviour they heralded, claiming, for example, that despite receiving heads of state and generally behaving like one since the spring, the great man cannot be held responsible for government actions taken before his election. This circumspection indicates considerable concern about the staying power of the consensus behind Sisi and the army.

Finally, it may be useful in the short term to paint Sisi as commander-in-chief of an Egyptian 'war on terror', but he may wish to shed that label if the springtime spate of armed attacks on high-ranking police officers and sensitive installations persists. Mubarak, after all, donned a similar terrorist fighter's mantle after the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat and again during the radical Islamist insurgency of the 1990s, and on both occasions he was forced to realise that 'security' alone could not cement his hold on power.

These challenges are all the sharper in a society as deeply polarised as Egypt has become over the past two years.

One crackdown to end them all

One of the regime's basic responses in a crisis is to identify internal and external enemies as the source of trouble in order to justify the repression of all opposition. But since Mursi was removed, the regime's crackdown has made even the excesses of Mubarak's detested regime pale by comparison. 'Security' has become a mantra that the authorities invoke to cast any and all dissent as akin to treason. The security forces have killed well over one thousand protesters since the army took power in July 2013. Moreover, while under Mubarak the number of political detainees peaked at around 14,000, the

WikiThawra project estimates that since the coup security forces have detained more than 41,000 people.¹

Riding a wave of hyper-nationalism, this assault has targeted icons like Mahir, Abdel Fattah and al-Masry, as well as hundreds of Islamist-leaning university students opposed to the coup. But it is not just anti-government activists who are singled out for punishments intended to set an example. It seems that the new 'standard' punishment for participating in protests is a two-year prison sentence and a fine of 100,000 pounds (\$14,000), which is steep even for students from the Egyptian elite, let alone those from poorer backgrounds. Many other students have been arbitrarily expelled.

Authoritarian regimes routinely adopt repressive measures in the belief they will dissuade and disperse opposition. In the long term, however, these tactics always generate blowback. In the case of Egypt today, while the regime has made 'security' its watchword, there is little sign that security is improving, in either the state-approved sense of quiet or the literal sense of physical safety. Workers continue to stop the 'wheel of production' in protest of terrible working conditions, and the anti-government protests at universities scarcely paused for end-of-semester exams. Meanwhile, the cities are essentially partitioned at night with many more roadblocks and police checkpoints than were ever present under Mubarak. The more the regime tries to emphasise security, the more the population as a whole – Sisi-backing or not – feels insecure. These are all signs of weakness for a regime so intent on showing its ferocity.²

The army vs. Egypt

The army's fundamental problem is that it needs to foster a lasting consensus behind its rule, but cannot hope to meet the expectations such consensus requires. The economic sphere is exemplary in this respect. The army's heavy-handedness and scare tactics have contributed greatly to the virtual evaporation of tourism, and Saudi

Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have been compelled to pour billions into Egypt's coffers in order to stave off collapse. The Gulf monarchies are only too eager for the army to quash the stirrings of democracy in the most populous Arab country, but even they must see the disappearance of such a vital revenue source as tourism as a very serious worry. As one commentator put it already in 2011, the army 'has played fast and loose with the nation's finances'.³ The IMF route, should the regime choose it, carries risks of its own.

It is possible, of course, that Sisi's presidency will surprise citizens and outsiders alike, and produce policy solutions to Egypt's deep social divides, economic woes and political polarisation. But the chances seem slim, if only because Sisi will find it virtually impossible to rein in the army's prerogatives.

The army's budget is gargantuan and unmonitored. Its vast and growing commercial empire is untaxed and shrouded in secrecy, its size estimated at anywhere from 4% to 60% of gross domestic product. This empire's oxygen is the total lack of civilian oversight enshrined in the army-drafted constitution. Its lifeblood is the ability to undercut any and all competitors – if not intimidate them out of business. If Egyptian military production were regularly taxed, it would provide substantial revenue for the country's perennially strained treasury. Instead, the army reinforces an informal economy, relying on access to government contracts and cheap labour in the form of conscripts. In these conditions, transparent government expenditures, the rule of law and equitable labour regulations run directly counter to the army's interests.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Sisi presented no economic policy ideas at all during what passed for the presidential campaign. Instead, with the election commission accusing his campaign of bribing prospective voters with energy-saving light bulbs, Sisi called on Egyptians to tighten their belts, even issuing a galling rebuke to the supposed profligacy of the struggling citizenry: 'Has any-

one considered giving a month's salary to the poor?'⁴

Now in power, Sisi will not be able to repeat such vacuous pronouncements for long before his government's inability to formulate a decent economic policy becomes inescapably clear. Ellis Goldberg has argued that the low turnout hurts Sisi but helps the army as a cohort,⁵ but the more basic problem facing both individual and institution is that while equitable paths to growth are not in the army's corporate interest, leaving such issues unaddressed will erode both Sisi's legitimacy and the army's.

To mask its incapacity here and elsewhere, the regime hopes to tempt the *salafi* movement to assume the same role of pliant opposition played by the Muslim Brothers in the later Mubarak years, if not the civilian partner role the Brothers adopted after Mubarak fell. While the Brothers aimed to rule after the 2011 uprising, their economic ideas were never particularly different from what had come before. The Brothers were keen not to upset the army's economic appellation, in fact, but their nationwide networks of activists and welfare institutions made them a political threat. The army seized the perfect opportunity of Mursi's tremendous unpopularity to cut the Brothers' ambitions down to size.

Replacing the Brothers with *salafis* – who have not presented any original economic ideas, either – would allow the regime to continue its crackdown against the Brothers and to keep the opposition divided while gaining the support of puritanical Egyptians (also funded by Saudi Arabia) capable of providing the same welfare services that the Brothers supply and that the state is no longer willing to offer.

Formerly an ally of the Brothers, the *salafi* Nour Party has thrown its support behind Sisi (despite its base often supporting anti-government protests in defiance of leadership directives). Nour was the only Islamist group allowed to debate the contents of the 2014 constitution, drafted after the 'Islamist' constitution approved in 2012 under Mursi was repealed. The

party may be afforded political space by the regime long enough to fill the void left by the Brothers, but its future remains uncertain. The Brothers' fate certainly provides an object lesson in the unintended consequences of striking deals with Egypt's real rulers.

Shoulder to the boulder

If it was not yet clear during the military's stint in direct power, from February 2011 to July 2012, and if there were silver linings around a cloud or two when the Brothers were in charge, it is obvious that 'there is no democratic transition at present' in Egypt.⁶ Instead, competition between elements of the old regime is shaping Egypt's economic and political landscape. How different this new regime will be from the old remains to be seen.

The new regime is not simply a resuscitation of Mubarak's. For a start, public opinion is far more polarised than under the ex-dictator, even in the last days before the January 2011 uprising. Second, the coterie around Sisi has yet to develop a mechanism for adjudicating internal disputes. Under Mubarak, the National Democratic Party had that function, but this organisation is disbanded and nothing is yet in its place.

With Sisi as a 'civilian' president, the army has avoided repeating the mistake of 2011 when it took power directly, while securing its interests through constitutional guarantees. Many of the faces have also changed: The business leaders close to Mubarak's son Gamal are orphaned by their disgraced patron, and the military deals directly with Gulf sponsors, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, rather than through civilian cronies. In the long run, however, the armed forces are but one pole in the balance of power in Egypt. Businessmen, bureaucrats, local strongmen and the mighty Ministry of Interior will all jostle for position in the new order.

That said, as under all post-Mubarak governments – from the Brothers to the military itself – the

crucial pole in the balance of power is the social forces built up in Mubarak's final decade and unleashed by the 2011 uprising. Now, as under Mubarak, economic inequality and political disenfranchisement generate instability. Now, as then, instead of confronting such deep-seated problems with the seriousness of purpose they demand, successive governments respond with a toxic mix of hyper-nationalism and brute force.

While this retrenchment will work in the short run, insofar as it will protect elite interests, the army's inability to respond to popular demands – bread, freedom and social justice – leaves the emerging regime fierce, outwardly strong, but potentially as brittle as its predecessor. The army-led regime has shouldered the boulder of stability to the top of the hill, but because this rock rests on a plateau of manufactured consensus, eventually it will tumble back down. ♦

Andrea Teti is director of the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Global Security and Governance and senior fellow at the European Centre for International Affairs. Vivienne Matthies-Boon is assistant professor at the University of Amsterdam. Gennaro Gervasio is lecturer in Middle East politics at the British University in Egypt. The above article was first published on Middle East Report Online, on the website of the Middle East Research and Information Project (merip.org).

Endnotes

1. *Mada Masr*, 25 May 2014.
2. Andrea Teti and Gennaro Gervasio, 'The Unbearable Lightness of Authoritarianism: Lessons from the Arab Uprisings', *Mediterranean Politics*, 16/2 (July 2011).
3. Robert Springborg, 'The Political Economy of the Arab Spring', *Mediterranean Politics*, 16/3 (October 2011).
4. Mohamed El Dahshan, 'Does General Sisi Have a Plan for Egypt's Economy?', *Foreign Policy*, 18 April 2014.
5. Ellis Goldberg, 'A New Political Dilemma for Egypt's Ruling Military', *Monkey Cage*, 2 June 2014.
6. Michele Dunne, 'US Policy Struggles with an Egypt in Turmoil', Arab Reform Initiative, Washington, May 2014.

Nobel laureates slam HRW ties to US government

The following letter was sent on 12 May to Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth on behalf of Nobel Peace Prize laureates Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and Mairead Maguire; former UN Assistant Secretary-General Hans von Sponeck; current UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Richard Falk; and over 100 scholars.

Dear Kenneth Roth,

Human Rights Watch characterises itself as ‘one of the world’s leading independent organisations dedicated to defending and protecting human rights’. However, HRW’s close ties to the US government call into question its independence.

For example, HRW’s Washington advocacy director, Tom Malinowski, previously served as a special assistant to President Bill Clinton and as a speechwriter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. In 2013, he left HRW after being nominated as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights & Labor under John Kerry.

In her HRW.org biography, Board of Directors’ Vice Chair Susan Manilow describes herself as ‘a long-time friend to Bill Clinton’ who is ‘highly involved’ in his political party, and ‘has hosted dozens of events’ for the Democratic National Committee.

Currently, HRW Americas’ advisory committee includes Myles Frechette, a former US ambassador to Colombia, and Michael Shifter, one-time Latin America director for the US government-financed National Endowment for Democracy. Miguel Díaz, a Central Intelligence Agency analyst in the 1990s, sat on HRW Americas’ advisory committee from 2003-11. Now at the State Department, Díaz serves as ‘an interlocutor between the intelligence community and non-government experts’.

In his capacity as an HRW advocacy director, Malinowski contended in 2009 that ‘under limited circumstances’ there was ‘a legitimate place’ for CIA renditions – the illegal prac-



Human Rights Watch’s former Washington advocacy director Tom Malinowski (pic) had previously served as a special assistant to President Bill Clinton and speechwriter to Secretary of State Madeleine Albright.

tice of kidnapping and transferring terrorism suspects around the planet. Malinowski was quoted paraphrasing the US government’s argument that designing an alternative to sending suspects to ‘foreign dungeons to be tortured’ was ‘going to take some time’.

Appearance of conflict of interest

HRW has not extended similar consideration to Venezuela. In a 2012 letter to President Chávez, HRW criticised the country’s candidacy for the UN Human Rights Council, alleging that Venezuela had fallen ‘far short of acceptable standards’ and questioning

its ‘ability to serve as a credible voice on human rights’. At no point has US membership in the same council merited censure from HRW, despite Washington’s secret, global assassination programme, its preservation of renditions, and its illegal detention of individuals at Guantánamo Bay.

Likewise, in February 2013, HRW correctly described as ‘unlawful’ Syria’s use of missiles in its civil war. However, HRW remained silent on the clear violation of international law constituted by the US threat of missile strikes on Syria in August.

The few examples above, limited to only recent history, might be forgiven as inconsistencies or oversights that could naturally occur in any large, busy organisation. But HRW’s close relationships with the US government suffuse such instances with the appearance of a conflict of interest.

We therefore encourage you to institute immediate, concrete measures to strongly assert HRW’s independence. Closing what seems to be a revolving door would be a reasonable first step: Bar those who have crafted or executed US foreign policy from serving as HRW staff, advisors or board members. At a bare minimum, mandate lengthy ‘cooling-off’ periods before and after any associate moves between HRW and that arm of the government.

Your largest donor, investor George Soros, argued in 2010 that ‘to be more effective, I think the organisation has to be seen as more international, less an American organisation’. We concur. We urge you to implement the aforementioned proposal to ensure a reputation for genuine independence. ♦

First decolonisation, now ‘depatriarchilisation’

If the 20th century saw the end of colonisation, then the 21st century must see the end of discrimination against women, says *Lakshmi Puri*.

AT the end of this week leaders of the Group of 77 and China will meet in Bolivia to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the group.

From the original 77, this group now brings together 133 countries, making it the largest coalition of governments on the international stage. Promoting an agenda of equity among nations and among people, sustainable and inclusive development and global solidarity have been at the heart of the G77's priorities since its inception. But none of it will be achieved without fully embracing the agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment.

Two weeks ago, I travelled to Bolivia to attend a historic international meeting in preparation for the G77 Summit, exclusively dedicated to women and gender equality. More than 1,500 women, many of them indigenous, packed the room, full of energy. Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, was also present – a testimony to his commitment and leadership to this critical agenda.

At this meeting, a message emerged, loud and clear. If we want the 21st century to see the end of discrimination, inequality and injustice, we must focus on women and girls – half the world's population, which continues to experience discrimination every day and everywhere. The 20th century saw the end of colonisation. Now the 21st century must see the end of discrimination against women. From decolonisation, we must move to depatriarchilisation.

This meeting took place at a critical time and in a significant place. Latin America has lived through its own struggles against discrimination and oppression. In a continent that used to be marked by striking inequalities and violent dictator-

ships, a vibrant movement has emerged to put the region on the path of social justice, democracy and equality. In Bolivia there is a constitutional law against violence against women and a law against political violence, making it a pioneer in the region and beyond.

This hope for a brighter and more just future must now spread to the world as a whole, and the G77 can play a defining role. The elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is coming to a critical point. The Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals is about to complete its work and member states will finalise the new development agenda in the course of next year.

This coincides with the 20-year review and appraisal of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the landmark international framework to achieve gender equality and women's rights. Beijing+20 provides us with an opportunity to drive accelerated and effective implementation of the gender equality and women's rights agenda and to ensure that it is central to the new development framework.

We need to take full advantage of these processes and their interconnections to ensure that gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment feature prominently in the new development agenda and to accelerate implementation.

We have a historic opportunity and a collective responsibility to make the rights and well-being of women and girls a political priority, both globally and within every country. To this end, the new framework must adopt a comprehensive, rights-based and transformative approach that addresses structural inequality and gen-

der-based discrimination.

This comprehensive approach must include targets to eliminate discrimination against women in laws and policies; end violence against women; and ensure the realisation of sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and adolescent girls throughout their life cycles, and the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care work.

Now is the time to put the full political weight behind passage of long-pending legislation to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality.

Now is the time to allocate the resources to fund services for victims and survivors of violence against women.

Now is the time to strengthen national data collection and undertake a time-use survey to better understand unpaid care work or a survey on violence against women.

Now is the time to make public spaces safe for women and girls.

Now is the time to improve rural infrastructure to strengthen women's access to markets and help tackle rural feminised poverty.

Now is the time to showcase champions of gender equality, to recognise role models that have overcome stereotypes and helped level the playing field for girls and women in all areas, in politics and business, in academia and in public service, in the home and the community.

Mahatma Gandhi rightly said that true freedom from colonialism will not be achieved unless each and every citizen is free, equal and is able to realise his or her potential. The 21st century must see the end of the centuries-old practice of patriarchy and gender discrimination, and unshackle women and girls so they

can fully enjoy their human rights.

When the G77 meets later this week at its 50th anniversary commemorative summit, I have high hopes that they will make this defining agenda of gender equality and women's empowerment a centrepiece of their global development and freedom project for the next 50 years. — IPS

Lakshmi Puri is the deputy executive director of UN Women, based in New York.

Editors' note

The above article was written ahead of the G77 summit. In the declaration that was eventually adopted at the summit in Bolivia on 14-15 June, the leaders of the G77 member states 'reaffirm[ed] the vital role of women and the need for full and equal opportunities for their participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development'.

Recognising that the potential of women in sustainable development has not been fully realised, the G77 leaders supported prioritising measures to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

They underlined their commitment 'to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women in political and economic decision-making and resource allocation, to give women equal rights with men to economic resources, and to ensure access to education, finance, information and communications technologies, markets, legal assistance and other basic services, including health-care services, including safe, effective, affordable and acceptable modern methods of family planning'.

They also recognised that violence against women seriously violates all human rights of women, and agreed to 'take action to eliminate all forms of violence, including feminicide and discrimination against women and girls, by means of a more systematic, comprehensive, multisectoral and sustained approach'.

The leaders reaffirmed the commitment to work together towards a post-2015 development agenda with a gender perspective. They also called for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls to be 'reflected as a standalone sustainable development goal and to be integrated through targets with inclusive policies to overcome poverty and foster social and economic development in our countries'.

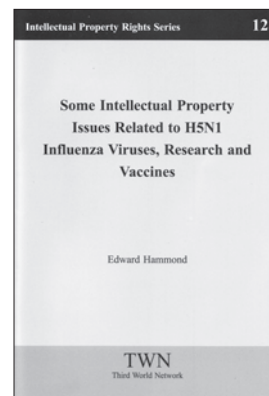
Some Intellectual Property Issues Related to H5N1 Influenza Viruses, Research and Vaccines

By Edward Hammond

Concern about the possibility of a new influenza pandemic has sparked increased scientific interest in influenza viruses, particularly the H5N1 virus that causes Bird Flu. Currently, global vaccine production capacity cannot meet the potential demand of a major Bird Flu outbreak and there are concerns that traditional vaccine production methods are poorly adapted for H5N1 vaccines.

As Bird Flu research increases and vaccine technology changes, a growing number of corporate and government laboratories are laying patent claims to influenza virus genes, gene sequences, treatments, and vaccines. These include proprietary claims on viruses originating in developing countries and that were shared with the international community for public health purposes. These claims threaten the ability of countries to prepare for a pandemic because they potentially restrict access to treatments and may make them too expensive for many countries to afford. In response to these problems, many developing countries are seeking reform of the World Health Organisation's Global Influenza Surveillance Network (GISN), to make sharing of the benefits from influenza research more fair and equitable.

This report reviews recent trends in patenting of influenza viruses and treatments, and provides details on a number of specific patent applications by corporations and government laboratories. It also provides information on corporate concentration in the vaccine industry, with a view to raising awareness of the implications of the wave of influenza patent claims and of the importance of reforming the international system for sharing influenza viruses and research results.



IPRs series no. 12
ISBN: 978-983-2729-83-9 40pp

	PRICE	POSTAGE
Malaysia	RM7.00	RM1.00
Developing countries	US\$4.00	US\$2.00 (air); US\$1.00 (sea)
Others	US\$6.00	US\$3.00 (air); US\$1.00 (sea)

Orders from Malaysia – please pay by credit card/crossed cheque or postal order. Orders from Australia, Brunei, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, UK, USA – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in own currency, US\$ or Euro. If paying in own currency or Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA. Rest of the world – please pay by credit card/cheque/bank draft/international money order in US\$ or Euro. If paying in Euro, please calculate equivalent of US\$ rate. If paying in US\$, please ensure that the agent bank is located in the USA.

All payments should be made in favour of Third World Network Bhd., 131 Jalan Macalister, 10400 Penang, Malaysia. Tel: 60-4-2266728/2266159; Fax: 60-4-2264505; Email: twnet@po.jaring.my

I would like to order.....copy/copies of **Some Intellectual Property Issues Related to H5N1 Influenza Viruses, Research and Vaccines.**

I enclose the amount of US\$/Euro/RM (cheque/bank draft/IMO).

Please charge the amount of US\$/RM to my credit card:

☐ American Express ☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard

A/c no.: _____ Expiry date: _____

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

A dark heritage

As the world is transfixed by the World Cup in Brazil, it may be pertinent to recall that football was a British export. In the following piece, *Jeremy Seabrook* however reminds us that Britain's exports to her colonies – and, in this particular case, Brazil – included some intangibles which were less than savoury.

THE success of the World Cup in Brazil has thrust into the background all the demonstrations by the people against vast expenditures by the Brazilian government that will enrich world football bodies but leave little residue for them. The country has come under some scrutiny as a result of the publicity generated by the World Cup; and the image of samba, futebol and partying conceals a darker history, one which still haunts Brazil and demonstrates some unpalatable truths about its past relations with the West.

Few people now imagine that formal decolonisation actually liberated the captive peoples of the world from their colonial overlords. Emancipation from their tutelary power reckoned without the ambush set for the emerging entities by dissolving European empires. 'Development' may have appeared as a milder and more attainable prospect than socialism; but for its implementation, the severest circumstances were required.

The creation of a middle class is almost invariably trumpeted as the surest evidence that 'development' is indeed taking place in any given country. This apparently laudable process means the setting up of the rule of law, the growth of competent professionals and legal oversight of commerce and business. But the most important role of this 'new' middle class and its modest privilege is to police the poor, in order to safeguard its own gains; and it will not shrink from whatever severity is necessary.

In the case of Brazil, this also gave scope to former colonial powers (not, in this case, Portugal) to deploy their particular expertise gained in a long, doomed and bloody struggle to 'keep down' freedom-fighters,



Photographs of Brazilians who were disappeared under the country's 1964-85 military dictatorship. The BBC recently found evidence that the UK actively collaborated with the military regime in Brazil and trained them in 'sophisticated interrogation techniques', many of which were subsequently deemed to be torture.

those struggling for an independence which, alas, often proved to be only an interregnum before the country passed back under the supervision of Western shackles, from which it was to have been permanently freed.

There was a willingness among European powers to share their skills in oppressing people. It should not be thought that the British were so selfish as to keep to themselves, for instance, the lessons they had acquired in resisting liberation movements in Cyprus, Kenya, Malaya, Rhodesia or anywhere else. This has been the one area in which they have pooled their extensive knowledge: a common heritage of oppression has been the object of their generosity.

So it was that during the multiple dictatorships sustained by the West during the Cold War, as well as the amply documented involvement of the US, there were also fruitful collaborations between the British and those dictators whose brutality could be overlooked because they were on the side of freedom and democracy. The observation – originally by

Franklin D Roosevelt apropos of Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua – that 'Somoza may be a son of a bitch but he's our son of a bitch' was reiterated in relation to many other unsavoury regimes whose anti-Communism was the most important feature of their tyranny.

A revealing example of how methods of repression were shared comes from recently released papers in relation to the Brazilian military dictatorship of 1964-85. The BBC recently found evidence that the UK actively collaborated with the military regime in Brazil, and trained them in 'sophisticated interrogation techniques', many of which were subsequently deemed to be torture, and were banned by the authorities which introduced them; a prohibition which has not, however, prevented their more recent use in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

In the late 1960s, the authorities in Brazil and many other countries were caught up in a bitter conflict with the Left, which was seen as an ally of the Cold War enemy, the Soviet Union. It was a time of clamorous student upheaval, industrial unrest, popular activism; and the 'free world' had, as allies, a global network of repressive regimes whose purpose was to ensure that the poor and oppressed did not 'betray' their countries to Communism.

For the prevention of this catastrophe, there was no limit to the excesses connived at by the Western powers: the slaughter of scores of thousands of leftists in Indonesia which made the 13 rivers that flow through Jakarta run red with blood; the overthrow of the democratically elected Salvador Allende in Chile and the installation of the murderous Pinochet; alliance with a list of ghoul-

ish thugs, all in the name of the preservation of democracy – Mobutu, Zia ul Haq, Marcos, Park Chung Hee, Rios Montt, PW Botha, Trujillo, Noriega, Mubarak, Banzer, the Shah of Iran and even the later-repudiated Saddam Hussein.

Each of these regimes, embodiments of the ‘strong man’ school of politics, was inflected in a different way, and although all specialised in detention without trial and suppression of human rights, some specialised in extrajudicial executions while others preferred ‘disappearances’ or kidnappings.

The distinctive attraction of the Brazilian military – which ‘disappeared’ fewer victims than Chile or Argentina – was its embrace of torture as a means of silencing its opponents. After some years of rage against its enemies, which had the unfortunate consequence of leaving victims with scars, mutilations and all-too-tangible evidence of ill-usage, it took particular inspiration from methods used by the British in their long experience of ‘insurgency’ against recalcitrants of empire and, of course, ‘at home’, in Northern Ireland.

In May 2014, the BBC’s *Newsnight* current affairs programme showed that the UK had assisted the Brazilian military in interrogation techniques, justified at the time by the argument that these represented an improvement, or ‘a step in the right direction’, since these were an advance on more brutal traditional ways of extracting information.

In 2012 Dilma Rousseff, president of Brazil and former victim of the dictatorship, set up a Truth Commission which, within two years, would bring to light some of the suppressed stories of that formative period in the recent history of the country. It was to be a conciliatory process – an amnesty law passed in 1979 (and upheld by the Supreme Court in 2010) ensured that no military officials accused of torture would face prosecution.

Some victims – and a few of the perpetrators – have offered their testimony, which has revealed the secret role played by Britain in the work of torture, particularly of that elegant kind which can be accomplished with-

out leaving tell-tale physical scars. One recipient of this treatment told the Commission he felt that the aim of the process was to destabilise his personality, to extract false confessions – sleep deprivation, hooding, freezing air condition, constant bright light.

Such methods were referred to as ‘the English system’ and ‘a leaf out of the British book’. In August 1972, the British ambassador to Brazil wrote a secret letter to an official in which, referring to the Brazilians and their desire to adopt more subtle modes of interrogation, he said, ‘As you know, I think they have in the past been influenced by suggestions and advice emanating from us; but this connection no longer exists ... It is important that knowledge of this fact should be restricted.’

One of the torturers, Col. Paulo Malhaes, now elderly and confined to a wheelchair, in his long hours of evidence, not only told of his part in killings and mutilations, but also expressed his liking for psychological torture which could turn left-wing militants into effective infiltrators of their own organisation. He said the idea for this useful expedient originated in Britain, to where he admitted he had travelled to receive instruction in this fine art. Malhaes was murdered shortly after giving his evidence in a burglary at his home.

‘Sensory deprivation’ – a condition experienced by people who undergo catastrophic trauma, trapped underground or in the rubble of a collapsed building – was a contrived condition, known as the ‘five techniques’: these consisted of being made to stand against a wall for hours, hooding, exposure to noise of varying pitch, deprivation of sleep and minimal nourishment. These methods were banned by the British government in 1972, as a result of an outcry against their use in Northern Ireland.

But like so many outdated imperial techniques, they had a vibrant afterlife in a Brazil where more ‘civilised’ techniques came as a welcome alternative to the violated and maimed bodies of victims of the military authorities. A former policeman told the Truth Commission that British agents also made the journey to Rio de Janeiro in order to offer courses on the

benign methodology of untraceable torture on the frail structure of the human form.

The World Cup held in Brazil this year and the Olympic Games to be held there in 2016 are no doubt calculated to relegate memories of the age of global military juntas to the pre-history of the day before yesterday; but the legacy of repression has scarcely been erased from a country which remains – despite the frequently published statistics that over half the population now belong to ‘the middle class’ and that 40 million people were ‘lifted out of poverty’ in the past decade – one of the most unequal in the world. In 2010 the top 10% of the population received 44.5% of its income and the poorest 10% just 1.1%. Three percent of the population still own two-thirds of arable land; and in the years between 1980 and 2010, there were one million homicides. More than half the deaths of young men in Brazil are murders.

As for the serene untroubled progression of the model democracies of the world, both European and American, constant revelations of their covert actions are still coming to light; not the least significant of them being the discovery by Cambridge historian Peter Martland that Britain’s MI5 intelligence agency recruited Benito Mussolini in 1917, in order to assist with keeping enthusiasm for the war alive in his country. Mussolini was then a newspaper editor, and he promised to use the paper as an instrument against disruptive strikes in favour of peace.

Although guilt by association is contrary to the democratic ideal, it is difficult not to conclude that a Britain which keeps company with military rulers, dictators and a future Duce displays as much about its imperishable values as it does when reciting its litany of freedom, democracy and choice; and this scarcely enhances the high moral tone it still deploys in the affairs of that fictive and shifting entity known as ‘the international community’.

Jeremy Seabrook is a freelance journalist based in the UK. His latest book is The Song of the Shirt (published by Navayana, June 2014).

A level playing field?

Global sport in the neoliberal age

With an eye on the World Cup in Brazil, *Mike Marqusee* says that in our neoliberal age, sport has become a fertile zone of capitalist intersection and mutual aggrandisement.

ONE of the hallmarks of the neoliberal age has been the exponential expansion of commercial spectator sport – in its economic value, political role and cultural presence. All of which will be thrown into high relief during the World Cup.

In recent years, the industry has grown in all regions above the local GDP rate, and is estimated to have generated \$135 billion in direct revenues in 2013. These revenues derive from four elements: gate receipts, corporate sponsorship, media rights and merchandising. Revenues from sponsorship and media rights have grown fastest and together now make up over half of total revenue. But whereas in North America and Europe, gate receipts remain the single biggest source of revenue, in the BRIC countries and in Asia as a whole sponsorship is now the biggest money-spinner, accounting in China for 48% of total sports revenues. Meanwhile, though merchandising is marginal in most of the world, it is significant in North America, where it accounts for 25% of revenues.

Despite its growth, the sports industry, narrowly defined, is still dwarfed by the pharmaceutical (\$1.1 trillion a year) and automotive (\$1.8 trillion) sectors. But direct revenues tell only a part of the story. Sport is interwoven with other industries: footwear, sportswear, soft drinks, advertising, among others. It's a central driver in media industries – print, broadcast and digital. And it's critical to the gambling industry, legal and illegal, with betting on sports estimated to be worth between \$700 billion and \$1 trillion a year.



Brazilian star striker Neymar speaking at an official pre-World Cup press conference amid a backdrop of corporate sponsors' logos. 'All the contradictions of commercial spectator sport will be on display, in heightened form, in this year's World Cup.'

Neoliberal ideology

Sport has become a fertile zone of capitalist intersection and mutual aggrandisement. It should therefore not be surprising that it has also become a major carrier of neoliberal ideology, used to promote a competitive individualism in which the pursuit of victory and success is presented as the purest form of personal self-expression. Nike is the obvious example, with its injunctions to 'just do it' and 'risk everything' and its strategic linkage to sports superstars. What is celebrated is a 'triumph of the will' – in which adverse circumstances are made to bow to individual desire. It's a version of what has been described as 'magical voluntarism', identified by Mark Fisher as a key component of today's dominant ideology.

It needs to be said that this ethos of egocentric assertion is by no means inherent in sport, which is not about 'the law of the jungle' or a 'war of all against all'. On the contrary, it's a competitive activity built on a cooperative basis, requiring mutual agreement among competitors and between competitors and spectators. And it is intensely regulated; in fact, without

the regulation, the sport vanishes. Team sports, of course, set a premium on interdependence and a willingness to sacrifice individual priorities for the good of the collective. But even the most successful individual competitors are what they are only because they enjoy a network of personal and social support. No one can ever 'just do it' on their own.

One of the favourite metaphors of advocates of capitalist globalisation is borrowed directly from sports. They hunger for a worldwide 'level playing field' in which competition flourishes freely and fairly. However, as in so many spheres, the impact of neoliberal globalisation on sport itself has been to create an increasingly uneven playing field, marked by widening inequalities.

As the major male sports swallow an ever-increasing share of sports revenues and investment, other sports are pushed to the margin. In South Asia, cricket is so dominant that it has rendered hockey, at which India and Pakistan excelled for decades, nearly invisible. While women's sports have enjoyed increased revenues in absolute terms, the growth of male sports means that women still receive only 0.5% of corporate sports sponsorship.

Elite male European football now accounts for more than 35% of global sports revenues; a similar share goes to the Big Four North American team sports (baseball, basketball, ice hockey and American football). Within European football, the five biggest leagues comprise half the total market and the top 20 teams one-quarter of that market.

The English Premier League

breakaway in the early 1990s has proved to be a watershed. The big clubs' main motive was to maximise their share of broadcasting revenues. Since then, the tendency has been for the rich teams to get richer, while the rest face perpetual insecurity. In effect, the billionaire-backed clubs are now hoarding the best players, making it even harder for others to compete with them. UEFA, the governing body of European football, has introduced its Financial Fair Play rules in an attempt to restrain the growing inequality, but they are unlikely to affect the overall imbalance.

Meanwhile, European football recruits extensively from Latin America and Africa, whose domestic competitions are thereby weakened. Compounding the talent drain, globalised broadcasting has in many regions made Europe's big clubs more famous and more widely followed than local teams.

The general trend towards a concentration of wealth and power is neatly illustrated by recent events in world cricket. Earlier this year, the three richest cricket boards – India, England and Australia – combined forces to impose a new order on the International Cricket Council (ICC), the game's governing body. From now on the Big Three will take home a larger share of the game's global revenues, dictate unilaterally which other teams they'll play and how often, and wield an effective veto on all ICC decisions. There's also a plan to introduce a two-division structure for Test cricket, with a telling wrinkle in the scheme: none of the Big Three are ever to be relegated to the second division. So their standing in the competition will be guaranteed not by the quality of their cricket but by their financial clout.

Unpredictability and spontaneity are at the heart of sports, and they are at odds with the capitalist drive to maximise profits and eliminate variables. An extreme example is bookmakers who seek to fix results, thus guaranteeing the return on their investment. But sponsors too would prefer some professional-wrestling-like scripted entertainment: no annoy-

ing upsets or injuries or mysterious losses of form to compromise their projections. The problem for them is that their property would forfeit all value should it be seen to be scripted.

So there's a tension between capitalist imperatives and sporting imperatives. In fact, the whole idea of sports competition as a mirror or metaphor for capitalist competition is misconceived. The 'level playing field' in sport is constituted by a rigid scaffolding of rules without which the competition dissolves. Capitalism's version is a deregulated arena of limitless accumulation. The aim of capitalist competition is to eliminate (or acquire) the competitor. In sport, you need the opponent to survive and return for the next match or season, which always begins the contest afresh. And of course, what's at stake in the two types of competition is fundamentally different. The penalties for coming second do not compare.

Corporate-branded spectacle

All the contradictions of commercial spectator sport will be on display, in heightened form, in this year's World Cup. Dave Zirin, in his invaluable new book, *Brazil's Dance with the Devil*, shows how this sporting mega-event has become a carnival of state-sponsored neoliberalism, characterised by mass evictions, gentrification, increased repression and surveillance, vast expenditure on

redundant facilities and corporate plundering of public funds. It's a boon for the construction, property, security and media industries, but a bane for many others, as was demonstrated last year, when huge numbers of Brazilians took to the streets to protest against the World Cup priorities that have skewed the country's development.

World Cup boosters claim that once the competition is underway and 'the ball is rolling' all the discontents will vanish. What's certain is that there will be a concerted effort to convince us that this is so. Those who persist in talking about the social cost underlying the festivities will be condemned as killjoys and naysayers. We are cast as consumers and nothing but consumers, expected to imbibe the corporate-branded spectacle without qualms or conscience. In that context, engaging critically with sports, seeing them as part of the broader human current, becomes a necessary subversive act. The international football federation FIFA and its corporate partners have a vested interest in promoting tunnel vision, but the rest of us do not. Enjoyment of the football and critique of its context can and should go hand in hand. The idea that one excludes the other is a myth we need to shed. ♦

Mike Marqusee writes on politics, culture and sport, and is a columnist for Red Pepper, from which this article is reproduced (June-July 2014, www.redpepper.org.uk).



red pepper

The magazine of the movement.

www.redpepper.org.uk/trialsub

Try it for just **£5**

Although he died at the age of 38, the Iraqi poet *Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab* (1926-1964) was distinguished for his literary innovations in Arab poetry and a pioneer of the free poetry movement. His painful experience of exile is reflected in the following poem.

For I am a stranger

Badr Shakir Al-Sayyab

For I am a stranger
 Beloved Iraq
 Far distant, and I here in my longing
 For it, for her ... I cry out: Iraq
 And from my cry a lament returns

An echo bursts forth
 I feel I have crossed the expanse
 To a world of decay that responds not
 To my cry

If I shake the branches
 Only decay will drop from them
 Stones
 Stones – no fruit
 Even the springs
 Are stones, even the fresh breeze
 Stones moistened with blood
 My cry a stone, my mouth a rock
 My legs a wind straying in the wastes

Translated by Mouna A Khouri and Hamid Algar