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BOLIVIA CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT: Message from the land of retreating glacier

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The Chacaltaya glacier, a mountain 30 km from La Paz whose peak reaches 5,530 meters above sea level, is one of the powerful global symbols of climate change. Until a decade back the highest ski run of the world is now a rocky rubble. Bolivia is home to 20% of the Andes Glaciers, many of them are replicating Chacaltaya's retreat. The city of La Paz get more than 80% of its water demands from the glacier and melting poses serious questions on the life of people and the city. The rapid retreat of glaciers and scarcity of water has pushed Bolivian Indigenous peoples who make 90% of its population further into poverty. The venue for the world Peoples Conference on Climate Change and Rights of the Mother earth was extremely relevant.

The International Conference organized in the heart of the Andes in the Cochabamba during 19th to 22nd April brought a whiff of fresh air in the stuck climate change debate. Participated by more than 35,000 people from all over the world and 70 governments; it provided a new perspective to the climate change discourse. A perspective that argues leadership for indigenous peoples and their contribution and role in mitigating climate change, a perspective that rejects market based false solutions, and a perspective that says that we all belong to earth and rather than the earth belonging to us. The Peoples' Summit was called in response to the failed Copenhagen Summit where few nations tried to hijack the process of negotiation to produce a text that did away with the basic kernel of the discourse historical responsibility of the developed countries, and that allowed them to continue to pollute without any accountability towards the people of the world, and that consigned the developing, less developed and many island states to destruction and death for no fault of theirs.

Evo Morales Ayma, the leftist and indigenous President of Plurinational state of Bolivia, who rose to prominence as a leader of Cocaleros, a group of farmers, factory workers and coca growers which was primarily responsible for compelling Bechtel to retreat from Bolivia. Bechtel, bank and the dictator President Mr. Hugo Banzer had collaborated to privatize water services in Bolivia. Seen by many as first rebellion of the 21st century, water wars in Cochabamba was destined to propel Evo

Morales to presidency later. Mr. Morales was one of the heads of the state who vociferously opposed the Copenhagen Accord, refusing to sign it, he called for an alternative Peoples Conference on Climate Change.

The enthusiasm of the world towards a conference, which did not have any UN sanction is evident in the fact that more than 35,000 people from 140 countries traveled to the small state of Bolivia. 17 working groups involving thousands of people worked to produce draft on different themes, at times talking on issues, (like structural reasons of climate change) which are prominently absent in the debates organized by the UN. Inaugurated among festivities and chants of traditional Andean priests where besides the President, representatives from five continents and India, and many more rejected capitalism as the main instrument of exploitation and committing to protect the rights of the mother earth. President gave a call of “death or Planet” denouncing capitalism at the main reason for destruction of planet earth. He also exhorted all developing countries to reduce emissions within their boundaries. The cheering by the crowd present in the stadium was punctuated only to heckle the UN representative, was indication of the sentiments of local people on the inaction of the UN and its complicity in bringing about Copenhagen Accord.

The “Accord of the People” as the final declaration of the Bolivia Conference was called raises many issues, which the leaders of the developing countries have failed to raise in the successive climate change summits. While completely rejecting capitalism, market based mechanisms, and obstinacy of the developed countries to continue their highly consumptive life style and efforts to shift the burden of containing climate change to poorer countries, the conference unequivocally reiterates its support to common but differentiated responsibility based on historical role, and two track negotiations under the Long term Cooperative Action and Kyoto protocol and asserts the right of developing countries to untied climate aid and technology.

The Declaration recognizes that it’s important to keep the rise in temperature below 1 °C. It is certainly an advance on 2°C target of the CA. At 2°C, the Peoples Accord foresees that between 20% to 30% species will be in the danger of disappearing. It blames capitalism as the main structural reason for this disequilibrium in power and resources, and argues that richest countries have five times more ecological footprint than the planet can support. It calls upon the developed countries to agree to and adopt ambitious emission reduction targets at Mexico in December 2010 reducing their emission by 50% by 2020, and reverting the emission level to 300 ppm.

It categorically states that all efforts to push the burden of containing climate change on the developing countries should be denounced. They must receive adaptation fund, and technology in order to combat the impacts and introduce adaptation. The fund should be in addition to loans and grants though other financial mechanisms and it must be in addition to the resources mobilized through carbon offsets and other market based mechanisms. All developed countries must commit to a new annual funding of the 6% of the GDP to tackle climate change in developing countries. This funding should be direct and free of condition and should not interfere with the national sovereignty

and self determination of the most affected communities and groups. It also proposes that the new funding mechanism should be set up at Mexico functioning under the authority of the COP, it should have significant representation from the developing countries.

The Accord recognizes agriculture as one of the main strategies to combat climate change. Through shift to sustainable agricultural practices based on indigenous and rural farming systems, the twin problems of climate change and food security can be addressed. It recognizes profound impacts on agriculture and ways of life in indigenous people and farmers throughout the world, and these impacts will worsen in the future. It blames agri-business as driven by corporate motives of profit and a major cause of climate change. "Its technological, commercial and political approach only serves to deepen the climate change crisis and increase hunger in the world" it says. It adds that all Free Trade Agreements, all forms of applications of the intellectual property rights, and false solutions including genetically modified organisms only exacerbate the current crisis. The Accord also says that the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples should be fully recognized, implemented and integrated in climate change negotiations and their collective rights to land and territories should be guaranteed as the best strategy to preserve and maintain forests, as most of them are located within the territories of the indigenous peoples and nations and other traditional communities. The Accord condemns REDD and its various versions. Taking a note that emissions of developed countries have risen by 11.2% during 1990-2007, it affirms that market mechanisms have failed to address the root cause of the crisis and therefore, should be completely rejected.

The Accord also speaks for climate migrants, which is the first time the term has been discussed in climate change discourse. It estimates that currently there are 50 million migrants and at the same trend it is estimated that 200 million to one billion people will be displaced due to climate change by the year 2050. It states that developed countries should assume responsibilities for climate migrants, welcoming them into their territories and recognizing their fundamental rights through signing international conventions that provide for the definition of climate migrants and require all states to abide by determinations. It also advocates setting up an International Tribunal of Conscience to denounce, make visible, document, judge and punish violations of the rights of migrants, refugees and displaced persons within countries of origin, transit and destination, clearly identifying the responsibilities of states, companies and other agents.

The most prominent proposal coming out of the declaration is the international climate tribunal. It demands creation of an International Climate and Environmental Justice Tribunal that has the legal capacity to prevent, judge and penalize states, industries and people that by commission or omission contaminate and provoke climate change. With many of the developed countries almost sure to be indicted, there would be few takers for that. Otherwise also treaty based bodies under the UN Framework have severe limitations. The option of creating a charter based body is always open but ensuring support of P 5 which is a prerequisite can be insurmountable task. Besides, not many in the first world will be amused with the complete rejection of market based mechanisms. The developed

countries look at them as major source of their funding support to developing countries and will be looking for more of them in Cancun.

The Declaration on the rights of the Mother Earth compels us to re-think our relationship with the Mother Earth. The humanity has always thought that the earth belonged to us. We apportioned and appropriated it as required and sometimes also when it was not required so much. The greed for mammon has always overwhelmed the organic relationship people should have with earth. While it remains to be seen how other countries big and small respond to the proposals of the world conference; the most significant outcome of the Conference has been that it has demanded a bigger role of civil society in international climate change negotiations, which should have an impact of stirring and re-energizing civil society in all countries. Cordoned off, and left out in freezing cold in Copenhagen, civil society all over the world are definitely going to feel the warmth of the Peoples Accord framed in the city of eternal spring.

