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Pablo Solon- Former chief negotiator for the Bolivian government

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Twenty years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992, the environmental crisis continues to worsen. The unsustainable development model that gained dominance in the world resulted to grave loss of biodiversity, melting of polar ice caps and mountain glaciers, alarming increase in deforestation and desertification and the looming danger of an at least 4°C increase in temperature, which will threaten life as we know it. Science is saying that we are approaching a point of no return that will change the way our planet has behaved over 650,000 years”

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) that will take place in Rio de Janeiro this coming June is expected by many to be a milestone opportunity to address the issue of the restoration of the equilibrium of the Earth’s system. But instead of moving the world towards a just and sustainable path, the document that is being negotiated for adoption in June is promoting new market mechanisms for the commodification and financialization of nature, life and ecosystem services under the mirage of a “Green Economy”

The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) developed the concept of “Green Economy” on the argument that the recurring energy, climate, environmental, food and financial crises are results of “gross misallocation of capital.” The UNEP analysis does not acknowledge the problems inherent in treating nature as capital, which has led to the hyper-exploitation of the Earth’s resources and further expanded the already severe inequalities between and within

nations, and among societies and peoples.

Promoters of the Green Economy consider it essential (and normal) to put a price on the free services that plants, animals and ecosystems provide for the conservation of biodiversity, water purification, pollination of plants, the protection of coral reefs and regulation of the climate. For the Green Economy to work, it is necessary to identify the specific functions of ecosystems and biodiversity and assign them monetary values, evaluate their current status, set a limit after which they will cease to provide services, and put a price on the cost of their conservation in order to develop a market for each particular environmental service. The architects of Green Economy believe that the instruments of the market are powerful tools for managing the “economic invisibility of nature.”

Since the publication of “Our Common Future,” or the UN Brundtland Report in 1987, policy makers have subscribed to the idea that a healthy environment and economic growth should be mutually supportive of each other. In practice, however, over the past two decades, governments have tended to prioritize economic growth over the environment and emphasized business interests and market mechanisms in their elaborations of sustainable development.

One example of how the Green Economy is being put in practice is the initiative known as REDD (Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation), which consists of isolating and measuring the natural capacity of a living forest to capture and store carbon dioxide, and predicting that the future intentions of the forest users / forest owners are to deforest that area, in order to issue certificates for “reductions in greenhouse gas emissions from avoided deforestation”. These certificates are expected to be traded in a variety of primary and derivatives markets, largely benefiting intermediaries, and yet even now there are signs that the complexity and non-transparent nature of these transactions could eventually bring about its own carbon market crash.

Nonetheless, the scheme is designed so that these certificates can be commercialized and acquired by companies in developed countries that cannot meet their climate mitigation commitments. Rather than reduce the excess carbon in the atmosphere, therefore, this “green market mechanism” at best allows pollution to continue to be emitted elsewhere. This is the essence of carbon trading. At worst, REDD runs risks of increasing overall carbon emissions, as accounting errors and falsehoods or relocated deforestation can be expected to release a steady stream of emissions, somewhere beyond the sight of the carbon credit buyers.

Despite the efforts of proponents to promote REDD+ as a viable forest conservation and climate change mitigation strategy, and the growing emphasis on putting safeguards and mechanisms to guarantee rights of indigenous peoples, many communities are concerned that REDD will cause further erosion of rights of indigenous peoples as well as other local communities over forest use, conservation and management.

Thus, REDD market mechanism, regardless of how inherently volatile and unstable it proves to be, will permit developed countries more time to continue polluting the world, while they are allowed to buy new forms of control over resources that rightfully should be in the custody of the peoples of the South. REDD illustrates many of the problems that are artificially created within carbon trading schemes. Other initiatives proposed under the paradigm of a Green Economy include the privatization of water, a push for agro-industrial business operations despite alarming impoverishment of small farmers channeled into these large-scale operations, the development of genetically modified organisms and geo-engineering amongst others.

A New Path for a Different, Better Future

The ideas of the first Rio conference and the false solutions adopted and strengthened over the last twenty years have not been able to abate the social-economic and environmental problems that continue to plague humanity and nature in this century. In order to stop the new offensive for the commodification and privatization of nature it is necessary to strengthen and articulate all the struggles in the world and in our region in defense of the commons.

Instead of putting a price on Nature we need to recognize that humans are part of Nature and that Nature is not a thing or mere supplier of resources. The Earth is a living system, it is our home and a community of interdependent beings and parts of one whole system. Nature has rules that govern its integrity, interrelationships, reproduction and transformation. In Rio+20 governments should recognize, respect and make sure that the rules of nature prevail.

Instead of applying the market rules to Nature what we need is to forge a new system based on the principles of:

- *peace, harmony and balance among all and with all things;
- *complementarity, solidarity, equality and social and environmental justice
- *collective well-being and the satisfaction of the basic necessities of all
- *recognition of human beings for what they are, not what they own;
- *elimination of all forms of colonialism, imperialism and interventionism;

We cannot keep promoting such destructive model of development that does not acknowledge the planetary limits of economic growth

New technologies should not mean limitless, reckless economic growth propelled only by capitalist motives. Scientific advances, under some circumstances, can contribute to resolve certain problems of development but cannot ignore the natural limits of the Earth system.

All countries need to produce the goods and services necessary to satisfy the fundamental needs of their populations, but by no means can they continue to tread the path of development that has led the richest countries to have an ecological footprint five times bigger than what the planet is able to support. Currently, the regenerative capacity of the planet has already exceeded more than forty percent. If this pace of over-exploitation of our Mother Earth continues, we will need two planets by the year 2030.

In an interdependent system in which human beings are only one component of the whole, it is not possible to only recognize the rights of the human part without instigating an imbalance in the system. To guarantee human rights and to restore harmony with nature, it is necessary to effectively recognize and apply the rights of Nature.

We have to end the system of wasteful and luxury-oriented consumption that privileges the elite. Developed countries must change their unsustainable patterns of production and consumption through public policies, regulations, as well as conscious and active participation of society, particularly the marginalized sections, to address the grave inequities and inequalities in resource use and access within societies and between nations.

States must guarantee the human right to water, education, health, communication, transportation, energy and sanitation. The provision of these services should be essentially public and based on efficient social management, not private business. The principal goal should be common wellbeing and not merely private profit, in order to ensure that these services reach the poorest and most marginalized sectors in an equitable manner. It is necessary to ensure the right to proper nutrition by strengthening food sovereignty policies and not by promoting agri- businesses.

Under the framework of common but differentiated responsibilities established in the 1992 Rio Declaration, the so-called developed countries must assume and pay their historical ecological debt for having contributed the most to the deterioration of the Earth system. The payment of this ecological debt by developed countries to developing countries and the sectors most affected among their own populations should replace to the greatest possible degree the ecological damage done. Developed countries should transfer financial resources from public sources and also socially and ecologically appropriate technologies required by sovereign developing countries.

Rich and developed countries must not impose trade agreements on poor and developing countries that contribute to further exploitation and degradation of nature in the latter.

The enormous resources dedicated to defense, security and war budgets by developed countries should be reduced. These resources should instead be used to address the effects of climate change and the imbalance with nature. It is inexcusable that 1.5 trillion dollars in public funding are used on these activities, while just 100 billion US dollars from public, private funds and market sources are dedicated to address the impacts of climate change in developing countries.

A financial transaction tax should be created to help build a Sustainable Development Fund to attend to the sustainable development challenges faced by developing countries. This financing mechanism should generate new, stable and additional resources for developing countries and must be managed with utmost transparency and participation by citizens and not be left to international financial institutions that refuses to change their development framework and operations

Intellectual property rights over genes, microorganisms and other forms of life are a threat to food sovereignty, biodiversity, access to medicine and other elements that are essential for the survival of low-income populations. All forms of intellectual property over life should be abolished.

The collective global response that is needed to confront the crisis we face requires structural changes. We must change the capitalist system, not the Earth system.

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