

FOCUS

ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE



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INSIDE Failing in East Timor / Fiona in wonderland / Downing Street's double-standards / An African voice for Ireland / Time for action on climate change / Southern voices at the World Social Forum



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Credits & Contact details

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We have tried to contact all relevant photographers to seek their permission to use photographs. We apologise to those we have been unable to trace.

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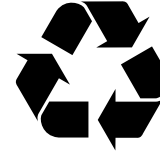
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In a world that seems so unfair, don't you wish that Ireland would stand up for justice? Yet there have been moments to be proud of when Ireland helped make a difference:

- against **apartheid**
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- for **debt cancellation**

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For 30 years, Comhlámh (Irish for 'solidarity' and pronounced 'co-law-ve') has been **educating** and campaigning for global justice in **solidarity with the developing world**.

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Action:

Take action on illegitimate debts

Did you know that impoverished countries are being forced to pay back illegitimate debts to rich countries and Northern controlled lending institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)?

Vast amounts of the debts being repaid by impoverished countries (such as by Liberia, the Philippines, and many more) have not benefited the people in any way and are therefore illegitimate. This is because many of the loans were irresponsibly contracted for failed development projects (such as for power plants, dams or agriculture projects) or were given to corrupt political leaders who stole the money or used it to oppress their people.

In addition, indebted countries have by now re-paid their debts many times over. Their economies have also been devastated through enforced policy conditions attached by lenders to loans and debt cancellation.

The Irish government has in the past demonstrated strong international leadership through its 2002 debt policy that supported debt cancellation for the poorest countries. It

has also promptly paid its full contribution to the 2005 debt cancellation G8 deal which finally recognised the need for 100% debt cancellation. But Ireland needs to be more vocal now in ensuring that all illegitimate debts are cancelled immediately.

Write to the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Development Co-operation and Human Rights ask them to:

- Publicly recognise the concept of illegitimate debts and call for the cancellation of these bi-lateral and multi-lateral debts.
- Call for a UN definition of illegitimate debts.
- Call for a public inquiry into World Bank and IMF loans.
- Work to ensure responsible future lending practices at the World Bank and IMF in order to ensure that another debt crisis does not occur again.

To read more on illegitimate debt and the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, see Pages 6-7.

Over to you: write to our ministers calling for the cancellation of illegitimate debt

Brian Cowen T.D.
Minister for Finance
Department of Finance
Government Buildings
Upper Merrion St
Dublin 2

Email: minister@finance.gov.ie

Dermot Ahern T.D.
Minister for Foreign Affairs
80 St Stephen's Green
Dublin 2

Email: minister@dfa.ie

Conor Lenihan T.D.
Minister for Development
Co-operation and
Human Rights
Irish Aid
Dept of Foreign Affairs
Bishop's Square
Redmond Hill
Dublin 2

Email: conor.lenihan@dfa.ie

This action
is brought to
you by



Four years after independence and despite billions of dollars in aid, Timor Leste is already facing political crisis. It's making many Timorese increasingly skeptical of the international community's nation building abilities, writes Fionnuala Cregan.

Failing in Timor Leste

A line of people are standing by the port in Timor Leste's capital city Dili watching as a ship docks and a sea of white containers with black UN logos spills on to the quay. "Here we go again," says onlooker Dulce Fernandes, "Will we ever be independent?"

In May last year, on the eve of the planned closure of the UN Peacekeeping Mission from Timor Leste, escalating tensions between various factions of the Government, in particular the police and the military, led to a breakdown of law and order in Dili.

Ten months on, the crisis continues.

The words "Failed State" have begun to be uttered among the international community. Only four years after independence and already the second newest nation in the world has fallen into crisis. Nation building has failed - the Timorese leaders are incapable of governing and a population, easily manipulated, resorts to violence to resolve its problems.

But does the blame for the crisis lie

entirely with the Timorese? Didn't the international community play a central role in nation building in Timor Leste, not least through the allocation of billions of dollars in aid? What had all that money gone towards? Had foreign aid failed?

For many Timorese, the crisis has led to questions about the multi-million dollar aid package that played a central role in their country since 1999. While not denying that foreign assistance is essential for the growth of their nation, they have begun to question its implementation and ask how they have moved from a people solid and united during resistance to Indonesian rule to the crisis ridden and divided nation it is today.

Amidst the complex web of internal and external issues, some of today's problems can be traced to the beginnings of the aid package developed in response to the violence following the independence referendum of 1999. "When the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was established in 1999, its mandate and

mission was designed in New York. The Timorese were largely excluded from the design process," says Guteriano Neves of the NGO Lao Hamutuk, "Most of the UNTAET staff were internationals with little knowledge of Timor Leste's social and economic problems resulting in a lack of critical local knowledge and language problems. The exclusion of the Timorese during the transition phase had serious implications for the future development of the country."

While the UN would claim that the mission's structure reflected the lack of local capacity and relevant skills which was a legacy of centuries of colonisation and decades of occupation, some Timorese disagree.

"The UN should have known that although the public administration and infrastructure was destroyed, there were some still functioning local structures and experienced people," says Guteriano, "Had the UN reached out to the grass roots, they could have used the capacity of institutions like the Catholic Church and



Clockwise from top left: The ubiquitous UN white vans; protesters traveling to anti-government demonstrations; houses destroyed during the May crisis; a roadside internally displaced camp; traditional leaders at a town meeting; a local NGO carrying out a survey (Photographs: Fionuala Cregan).

the political networks of resistance which had a strong nationwide structure.”

As a result of this lack of consultation and participation of the Timorese people during the transition phase, a set of “imported” State institutions have been established.

“I think the UN pushed things too much” says Antero Benedito, lecturer in Development Studies at the University of Timor Leste, “Driven by deadlines and budgetary constraints, they did not give space

“Had the UN reached out to the grass roots, they could have used ... institutions like the Catholic Church and the political networks ... which had a strong nationwide structure.”

to the Timorese people to come together and design a vision of their own future. Instead they designed a system that the people don’t know what to do with and so they then need international advisors to teach them what to do. If a system had been built using Timorese knowledge and corresponding to their needs and capacities, then we wouldn’t need so many advisors - the capacity would already be there.”

Much of the new legislation – including the criminal code and the National Development Plan – has been developed by international advisors with little consultation with Timorese. As a result, according to Joao Pequinho of the NGO FTM, Timorese are losing a sense of ownership of their nation

building process. “If the community provides inputs in to the process and content, they are participating and learning so that when the international advisors leave, they will know how to develop their own policies,” he argues. “However, I think a lot of the large donors have used aid to influence policy for their own benefit as opposed to the benefit of the Timorese people.”

While smaller donors – such as Irish Aid – are well regarded, it is felt by many that the

larger bilateral donors are more motivated by economic and political opportunism than any interest or sense of responsibility to the Timorese. Many donors, the World Bank in particular, have pressured the government into focusing on private sector development, privatisation and export driven development as opposed to focusing on the urgent issues of malnourishment, preventable diseases, self-sufficient food production and education.

In fact, over a third of the US\$3 billion in aid was used for the payment of international staff and procurement overseas. While the expatriate community enjoys a high standard of living, the vast majority of the Timorese continue to live in conditions

of extreme poverty. Unsurprisingly a sense of frustration, disillusionment and in some cases, resentment, has grown.

“Our nationalist spirit which was very high during the resistance has been eroded by the nation building process because of a lack of participation,” says Guteriano. “We have been co-opted to adopt global standards and ideologies set up by rich countries and to neglect our reality and our local values. Aid did not enforce our independence but sometimes destroyed our hopes.”

It is clear that the recent crisis has had a devastating effect on Timor Leste, increasing poverty, unemployment and the trauma of their recent violent history. It has unearthed deep seated animosities among Timorese leaders in particular and, as the country faces into elections later this year, the violence could worsen. Yet, it has also acted as a wake up call to the population, leading them to reflect more deeply on their nation building process and on the need to resolve the crisis collectively and democratically.

It should also act as wake up call to the international community to the need for closer monitoring of aid and development programmes. We all need to ensure the sovereignty of Timor Leste is not being co-opted and that international assistance is based on the needs and interests of the Timorese people, who after decades of brutal occupation and a resistance that inspired solidarity movements worldwide, deserve to have their vision of peace and economic and political justice finally come true.

World Social Forum calls for cancellation of illegitimate debts

The Irish government must show leadership by recognising the concept of 'illegitimate debt'. Nessa Ní Chasaide, who was present at this year's WSF, explains why.

Focus Action

If you want to take action on illegitimate debt, turn to Page 3



Scenes from the WSF Nairobi 2007. (Photographs: Mireen Miatlen Samper)

Campaigners from all around the globe met in January this year at the World Social Forum in Nairobi, Kenya, for the biggest meeting of anti-poverty activists the world will see this year.

One of the issues rigorously discussed at the forum was the question of the debts owed by impoverished countries to rich governments and international creditor institutions. Activists from Asia, Africa and Latin America voiced the strong belief, held also by the Debt and Development Coalition Ireland, that vast amounts of the debts still owed by their countries to rich governments and creditor institutions are illegitimate in nature and should be cancelled immediately.

Many readers will remember the

Vast amounts of the remaining debts currently owed by impoverished countries did not benefit the people of those countries in any way, and are therefore illegitimate.

achievements of the *Make Poverty History* campaign of 2005, which did secure some debt cancellation for impoverished countries. The deal, however, did not go nearly far enough, impacting on too few countries and targeting only a limited number of creditor institutions.

Debt and Development Coalition Ireland argues that vast amounts of the remaining debts currently owed by impoverished countries did not benefit the people of those countries in any way, and are therefore illegitimate. This is because many of these loans were contracted for ill-conceived development projects which failed, never got started, or were given to corrupt political leaders who stole the money or used it to oppress their people.

Take the example of the Philippines, where in the 1970s a loan financed the building of a Nuclear Power Plant on the Bataan peninsula – a project riddled with corruption, wildly over budget, built by a US company and strongly supported by the US government. The Bataan plant was never even opened due to major safety concerns, including the plant being built near an earthquake faultline.

Many other cases exist where, creditors provided, or pushed, loans in the full knowledge that the funds would not be used for development purposes, or that the development project in question was likely to fail.

There are some signals from within the creditor community that consciences are being pricked. In recent months, the Norwegian government cancelled debts owed to it by 5 countries in the Global South to the tune of US\$80 million. The Norwegian government acknowledged their “shared responsibility” for the debts which resulted from failed domestic-interest driven lending in the 1970s and 1980s. This represents a ground-breaking acknowledgement from within the creditor community that lenders should be held accountable for providing irresponsible loans.

The Irish government is also implicated in the issue of illegitimate debts through its membership of the World Bank and IMF. While the Irish government responded swiftly to the 2005 debt cancellation deal by frontloading its payments toward the debt cancellation package, it can still do a lot more to achieve the cancellation of illegitimate debts.

The Irish ministers for Finance and Foreign Affairs can show leadership by recognizing the concept of illegitimate debt. They should call for the development of a collective UN definition of illegitimate debt. And they should pressure for a public inquiry examining the developmental impact of World Bank and IMF loans. They should also work to ensure responsible future lending practices at the World Bank and IMF in order to ensure that another debt crisis does not occur again.

Campaigners from Kenya, and from across the Global South at the WSF demonstrated clearly that they are actively working to hold their own governments to account for the loans which they accept on their behalf. It is time for governments in the enriched world, including Ireland, to show a similar level of responsibility and demonstrate their commitment to a more just world through the full cancellation of illegitimate debts.

Nessa is director of Debt and Development Coalition Ireland
www.debtireland.org

Voices from the World Social Forum Nairobi

Amid the idealism of building a better tomorrow, the 2007 World Social Forum in Nairobi was also criticised for being more marketplace than social forum. Participants talk to Miren Miailen Samper.



Wahu Kaara, Nobel Peace Prize Nominee, Kenyan Debt Relief Campaign

“As a woman from Kenya, I feel the World Social Forum being here is a good demonstration for Africa. For the people who missed the forum, I say that they missed an opportunity. We have now more energy to continue fighting for freedom as we consider our struggle as a lifetime experience. For us, the World Social Forum was just one event in a process. We continue that process in our daily struggles.”

Firoze Manji, Editor of Pambazuka News

“I think WSF did present an opportunity for civil society organisations in Africa to cross-fertilise experiences and plan collaboration on key political issues. Unfortunately, there was a clear over-dominance of the wealthy international NGOs and religious groups, whose voice was heard louder only because of their wealth and not because of the importance of their messages. It was, in that sense, much more of a market place than a social forum. Some people might say that this is inevitable but if we want to build a new world for tomorrow, we need to start living it today. Forums such as this should be an equaliser rather than a perpetuator of existing social relations.”

www.pambazuka.org

Christpine Oduma, Rural Kenya Luo Nyanza province, Siaya-Millennium District

“I am from the Nyanza province and

from the first district in Kenya called Millenium District, working towards the MDG’s. I was a volunteer at the forum as I was not able to afford to pay the entrance fee. The whole world was summarized in Nairobi and I took advantage of this as I interacted with many people. My role was to provide information at the youth camp and this was a great opportunity for me.”

Maria Elena Martinez, Mexican farmer and representative of Via Campesina North America

“The agrarian reform is on our international agenda. The global campaign for the agrarian reform was launched at World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005. We are advocating for policies which enable farmers to access their lands. At the World Social Forum in Nairobi we are launching our agrarian campaign on the 22nd of January. We are here to network with the african movement and starting to know them as the Via Campesina movement isn’t very strong in Africa”.

www.viacampesina.org

Frank Habineza, Nile Basin Discourse -Rwanda

“I am representing the civil society movement in the Nile Basin. We are against the privatisation of water and against the big dams. Our project is giving a voice to the voiceless, in order to allow civil society to participate at the consultation process. We are not alone, other groups in Latin America and Europe are opposed to the privatisation of water. We will never give up!”

www.nilebasindiscourse.org

Use your brain-power this election time!

Scientists believe they have located politicians' altruism 'control centre' deep within the human brain.

Focus Action has provided readers with some of the most important questions to tickle your local politician's 'medulla altrugata' – small though it is!

But be sure to ask the right questions. Scientists have also discovered that the medulla altrugata is only triggered when politicians detect potential votes.



Will you stop the EU using its aid to press African, Caribbean and Pacific countries into free trade areas with Europe via Economic Partnership Agreements?

Will you work to increase transparency in how the EU works?

We need to strengthen the role of the European Parliament and the Oireachtas in Europe's foreign policy areas such as trade and military interventions.

Will you strengthen Ireland's equality legislation so that it extends to the policies made by Government Departments and their implementation, in this, the European Year of Equal Opportunities, ?

Currently our equality laws are limited to areas such as services and employment - there is no obligation to 'equality proof' any new legislation.

Will you insist on changes to how the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO make decisions?

Those countries most affected by their decisions have least say in international institutions.

Will you make development coherence an obligation for all government departments?

There need to be mechanisms to check that other departments are not undermining development.

Will you press for international aid to be given without economic conditions?

Aid recipients should be accountable for how money is spent, but not pressed to take on policies they don't believe in. It is their development process, not ours.

Will you press for illegitimate developing country debts to be cancelled?

Those who lent money irresponsibly, for arms, or for 'white elephants' should not be repaid.

Will you pass legislation ring-fencing the 0.7% aid budget?

Without framing in law the commitment made at the UN we don't know if any government will keep its promise.

Pull out & keep!

Fiona in wonderland

~ A true story of how a girl pursuing her dream got caught in the traffic. Tale by Conall O’Caoimh.

Once upon a year ago in a far away land called Brazil there lived a young woman named Fiona (actually, that’s not her name, but she chose it so you could better understand her story). Now Fiona heard many people in her town speak of a distant wonderland of many treasures. She dreamed of going to that place called Europe, hoping to return one day, bringing riches to her family.

But to enter that magnificent land would not be easy, for its ports were heavily guarded. A cousin told Fiona of someone – a coyote – who, for a fee, would show her past the guards. The 19-year old saved until she had the €800 demanded by the man called Safado (not his real name either, but about the worst Brazilian insult we could print). What remained of her savings went on a return ticket to Europe and €1,100 to a language school in London.

Last October the young adventurer waved farewell to her family and boarded a plane to Europe landing first in Lisbon, and then Dublin. She managed to persuade the guards to let her in, promising she would not stay long. Fiona felt her luck was with her as two other Brazilians were turned home.

In Dublin Fiona met by arrangement with Safado, who travelling on his European passport would accompany her to a new life in London. The very next day, they set sail for Liverpool.

On board the great ship the middle-aged Safado asked the young woman how she would earn her living in London. Fiona replied that she would clean houses, and when her English improved, work as a waitress.

Safado sternly told Fiona she was mistaken. She would not work at cleaning, but in a lap dancing club, and in prostitution. Why else had he come to Dublin for her?

Shock overtook Fiona. She never dreamt of this. In fright and confusion, Fiona broke out crying. As Safado persisted she wisely used her only available defence: screaming. She bawled uncontrollably. This quickly drew the attention of other passengers.

Safado fled, but not without first stealing the envelope in which

Fiona held her remaining €400. He disappeared down a stairs and away.

Several passengers gathered round the sobbing stranger. One elderly couple in particular were very kind. But she could not speak English and they did not know what was the matter.

Arriving at Liverpool, Fiona was still bawling uncontrollably. The police quickly spotted her distress and stopped her, placing her in a cell for several hours of questioning without any food. Fiona knew she could not tell the truth. Despite showing a letter of registration for the school in London, the police turned her back to Dublin.

The young woman reached Dublin that same night, penniless, on the street and still sobbing. She wandered alone to keep warm, but found nowhere to sleep.

Fiona would not stop crying for three days. It was not just the grand adventure, but her very sense of herself, that had been shattered.

The next day Fiona saw a man carrying a Brazilian magazine and, still crying, approached him. A voice from home! A little safer.

The Brazilian community in Dublin has taken Fiona in and cared for her. Several months later, Fiona is still rebuilding her self confidence. She cannot afford language school, but has found cleaning work. One job paid €100 per week to live in as an au pair minding three children and cleaning – just one afternoon free each week.

Fiona continued uncertain about whether to go to the police until her parents in Brazil received a threatening message from Safado.

Asked what she would say to others coming to Europe, Fiona holds back her tears saying it is not the wonderland she was promised. ~

Find out more about human trafficking and migrants’ rights at www.ruhama.ie www.mrci.ie



Time For Change? Time For Action on climate chaos

The verdict's in. Climate change is real. But who's to blame and who will suffer, asks Sadhbh Goggins.



Photograph: Photonet.org

How many of us believe global warming and the resulting change to our climate is something which will happen far, far into the future? How many people say our descendants will deal with the issue, so why worry? How many don't think there's any point in trying to change their ways because they are only a drop in the ocean compared to the enormous issue of climate change?

The answer is: too many.

There is no longer any debate about whether climate change is real. It is happening right here, right now. Our generation will have to deal with more and more extreme climate events, with the disappearance of habitats and mass displacement of indigenous peoples. Even President Bush, who held out for so long against the tide of proof that it threatened to swamp him, has admitted he was wrong.

Of course, the question that everyone wants to ask is, how will this affect me? The answer, just like it has been throughout history, is that the poor will suffer.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has just released its latest paper on the issue of global warming. The research was put together by thousands of scientists from across the world. Considering how difficult it is to get scientists to agree with each other, this paper represents the minimum that they could all agree on. And the minimum is a frightening scenario.

The scientists predict there is a more than 95% chance we will experience more frequent hot days and nights and fewer cold days and nights. There is more than a 90% chance we will continue to experience increasing occurrences of drought, heat waves, heavy rainfalls and cyclones and a rise in sea levels. They are *virtually certain* this will continue into the 21st century.

A third of the world's population lives on less than \$2 a day. The impact of climate

change on farmers in poor countries can be the difference between life and death. Farmers who are already trying to cope with a harsh environment are facing greater extremes of climate, such as longer periods of drought and more frequent flooding.

The irony is that those living in poverty, the majority of whom are situated in sub-Saharan Africa or South America, contribute least to global warming. Yet these farmers are having to change centuries old traditional methods of farming in order to adapt to the changing climate, while we in Northern countries are insulated by our wealth from the damage we have caused.

Farmers in the Peruvian highlands have been struggling with the paradox of sudden hail storms which destroy their crops, and less rain, which dries the earth.

Farmers in the Peruvian highlands have been struggling with the paradox of sudden hail storms which destroy their crops, and less rain, which dries the earth. Hotter days are and colder nights bring the twin scourges of disease and freezing to the hardy alpaca. These animals are the backbone to life in Peru, providing milk, meat, cheese and material for clothing. The loss of their herds spells disaster to indigenous peoples.

Farmers are learning to adapt through the help of Practical Action, an NGO developing programmes to address the effects of climate change on disadvantaged communities. Numerous projects have been set up across South America, Africa and Asia to train farmers in adaptive and sustainable farming methods. In Peru, farmers are being trained as 'Kamayoq', a farmer that trains other farmers, in hydroponics and basic veterinary skills. Producing more nutritious food and erecting shelters for

the alpacas, coupled with the skills to fight infection, is at least allowing them to fight for life in an ever changing climate.

In Bangladesh, a country already prone to floods, flooding is occurring more often and is becoming more severe. In 2004, flooding destroyed four million homes and killed 700 people. Practical Action has implemented a project to advise people on building houses on a two foot high plinth, with attic spaces for storage of food and property during floods.

In Sri Lanka, rising sea levels are causing increasing salinity in low lying rice fields. Along with warmer days and lower rainfalls,

commercial rice varieties are struggling to survive. Here, farmers have been encouraged to try traditional rice varieties which are naturally able to withstand higher salinity levels, higher temperatures and pests. Trials have proved a success, with farmers sustaining their crops through the season and even increasing their yields.

Without the help of charities such as Practical Action and without drastic and immediate action by the more industrialised and wealthy nations, the world's poor will suffer multiple hardships above and beyond the hardships they already endure. The time for talk is over. If we do not want to see mass displacement of indigenous peoples and widespread famine, we must cut our emissions today and start implementing long-term, sustainable alternatives to fossil fuel use.

Find out more: www.practicalaction.org

Finding a united voice for Africans in Ireland

A recent conference asked whether Africans in Ireland can be united in one group, writes Alison Leahy.

For all the numbers of Africans in Ireland they are often invisible to policy makers, and their voices are going unheard. A single representative organisation sounds like a simple, even obvious, solution. Africans in Ireland seem happy to identify themselves as Africans, so by extension they should be prepared to work together.

Or so the theory goes. The debate at the conference on Africans in 21st century Ireland made it clear, however, that 'Africanness' is seen by some as an imposed and uncomfortable identity.

The associations formed by immigrants in Ireland are reminiscent of the groups they belonged to in Africa, where kinship associations are stronger than national allegiances. Son Gyoh, board member of the Galway Refugee Support Centre and speaker at the conference, argues African immigrants in Ireland have not yet developed strong networks that articulate collective agenda and influence policies. "African organisations tend to form along national and ethnic lines," he says, "What exist are clannish associations and they lack the clout to influence public opinion and state policies."

Decades of abuse and incompetence by governments in many African countries have also led to disillusionment with the state. "We are not used to going to the centre for

anything in Africa," said one participant. "It has failed so we don't have the idea that going to the centre is at all useful. Why should we?"

It's vital, however, that African immigrants in Ireland recognise they face many of the same problems if they are going to overcome them. While it is understandable that groups of diverse, and at times conflicting, people can find it difficult to work together, Son sees co-operation

The solution lies in finding ways for Africans to encourage larger society to acknowledge, debate, and cherish difference.

as necessary for combating exclusion, discrimination, and misinformation. "What fragmentation does is weaken the ability to respond to discrimination, to fight discrimination," he argues.

Part of the solution involves figuring out ways of respecting and celebrating individual identities while grouping together under the more visible banner of African to achieve common goals. Son feels community leaders have a role to play in building dialogue.

"Leaders need to show a sense of altruism and pluralism," he asserts. "Pluralism is important because there is a tendency in the traditional African culture for the leader to have the last say. It is important to allow people to talk, to contribute. Altruism is required in that the personal gains should be removed and there should be an appreciation of the wider agenda, the wider problem".

Son wants Africans to "play down their personal agenda as an ethnic or national group, the specific and national agenda, and put forward the agenda for the African cause, because in the wider course we are looked at as Africans not as Nigerians or Sudanese."

The challenges identified in the conference are not easily overcome. Being heard will require Africans in Ireland to speak in a unified voice, but without drowning out kinship, ethnic and other special identities. As if that isn't enough, they also have to avoid becoming isolated and invisible to the rest of Irish society. Ultimately, said conference participants, the solution lies in finding ways for Africans to "encourage larger society to acknowledge, debate, and cherish difference." The challenge has been voiced. The next task for Africans in Ireland will be voicing the solution.

To find out more, visit www.africacentre.ie

Downing Street's Double Standards

It would take some cheek for a government to condemn corruption while covering up a bribery scandal. So how cheeky is Downing Street, asks Damien Murphy.



Illustration: Alice Fitzgerald

Downing Street has long talked tough on corruption. Prime Minister Tony Blair has declared fighting corruption in Africa as one of his priorities and his government has ratified the OECD's convention on bribery, which – among other things – prohibits governments from considering their national economic interest when investigating cases of bribery. The tough talk has even been backed up by action, with the UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO) launching an investigation into allegations that BAE Systems, Europe's largest defence contractor, paid substantial bribes to secure contracts with South Africa, Saudi Arabia and, most recently, Tanzania.

And yet, there appears to be a double standard at play here. Last December, the SFO announced it was discontinuing its two-year investigation of BAE's so-called al-Yamamah deal with Saudi Arabia. Its decision was taken just four months after BAE signed a contract worth up to €15 billion to supply the Saudi government with 72 fighter planes.

There is some confusion as to the reasons behind the decision. The Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, claimed he didn't believe there to be sufficient evidence to secure a prosecution. The SFO, meanwhile, declared it had dropped the investigation on the grounds of national security. And, according to Downing Street, Saudi Arabia - Britain's

main intelligence contact in the Middle East - threatened to stop providing information on al-Qa'eda if the investigation continued. However, the intelligence services seem a

Double standards continue to exist, reinforcing the power imbalances to the detriment of those who have the least power to begin with.

little less sure, with MI6 denying that any such ultimatum was given by Saudi Arabia.

Whatever the truth about national security, the threat to Britain's financial interests certainly was real. If Saudi Arabia pulled out of the latest contract, thousands of British jobs would be put at risk and BAE's viability would be seriously threatened.

Nick Hildyard, of the British social justice advocacy group, The Corner House, suggests that the UK government's approach to alleged corruption itself constitutes a double standard, tantamount to corruption: "The UK government has been lecturing southern

governments on the need for them to tackle corruption – and has made 'good governance' a keystone of its development aid. The halting of the SFO investigation sends a clear message that the government lacks the commitment to put [its] own house in order... [and] sends the message that companies trading with countries of 'strategic importance' are above the law and can bribe with impunity."

The danger is that this specific instance could be turned into an example to be repeated. Precedents of this kind essentially provide *carte blanche* for continuing corruption, and undermine the legislation that exists to combat corruption. Double standards continue to exist, reinforcing the power imbalances to the detriment of those who have the least power to begin with.

The clearest illustration of this is the latest deal for which BAE is being investigated casts a light on the precedents set by Downing Street. Tanzania was reduced to borrowing to pay for an unnecessary and overpriced radar system supplied by BAE through a deal reportedly secured by bribery. And according to former development minister, Clare Short, it was Tony Blair who personally pushed the licence for the BAE deal through the cabinet. That's an odd precedent for a Prime Minister who pledged to stamp out corruption.

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A Rough Future for Guyana?

A new Comhlámh documentary by the Cork Action Network explores the connection between farmers in Ireland and Guyana.

As a former sugar beet grower, Corkman Paddy Harrington is familiar with the arguments over EU agricultural reform and the global sugar market. After all, he himself is a victim of the 2005 EU sugar reforms that resulted in the closure of the Mallow and Carlow beet factories and the end of sugar beet growing in Ireland. But Paddy wanted to see for himself the effects of the sugar reforms globally, so he was happy to accompany Comhlámh and WildAcre Productions to Guyana, where they were filming the documentary “A Rough Cut.”

“A Rough Cut” gives a view of the global agricultural system from the perspective of farmers, NGOs, conservationists and indigenous groups far removed from the policy makers in the EU and the WTO. Part of Comhlámh’s continuing work on food security, the documentary tells the story of Guyana’s struggle in the face of a global agricultural system which is tilted against small developing countries, as well as describing the difficulties for the survival of the family farmer in Ireland and Guyana.

The team travelled by boat, truck and small plane around the country, and Paddy met farmers and workers in the cane fields to find out how EU policies and US subsidised rice are threatening their survival. He also saw for himself the challenges faced by Guyana’s many rice growers, whose livelihoods were dealt a major blow by EU policies a few years ago. Dharamkumar Seeraj of the Guyana Rice Producer’s Association voiced the concerns shared by farmers both European and South American about the future of agriculture. “I think the global agricultural system will collapse,” he said. “It cannot sustain itself in its present form. And farmers over there, in Europe, are making noises, and so are the farmers here”

For Paddy, the problems he was experiencing in Ireland are not a world away from those of Guyana’s growers. “The farmers in the developed world and in the developing countries have things in common - we both face the end of the family farm, and we both struggle to find



argins for our products,” he says. “The power is concentrated in the hands of the supermarkets and the multinationals.”

With about 80% of the country covered in pristine rainforest, Guyana is also home to many indigenous peoples. Paddy travelled to the rainforest close to the Venezuelan border to meet with indigenous subsistence farmers to see how a small organic cocoa growing initiative might lead their community from poverty.

This sort of initiative, says Paddy, is the way to the future: “I think that as farmers the world over, if we can work together, we will have to be able to achieve something”

‘A Rough Cut’ is released in April.

Pick up your copy of ‘A Rough Deal’

To obtain a copy of the new Comhlámh documentary, ‘A Rough Deal’, contact Comhlámh.

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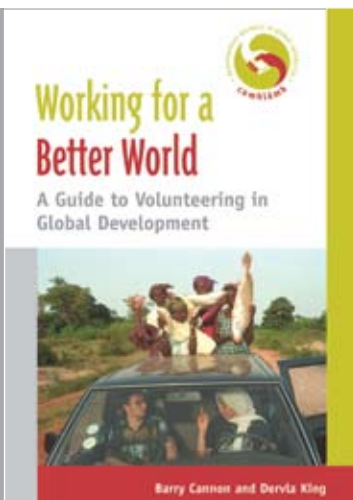
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