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Editorial

As its 60th anniversary (next 24th October) approaches, the United Nations Organization is going through one of its gravest crisis. It is questioned on one hand by certain big powers that consider that it is, amongst other things, too wasteful, oversized and insufficiently efficient; and, on the other hand by the peoples and NGOs that reproach it for its non-capability to eradicate poverty and to anticipate or to prevent conflicts. Will the "thing" have become useless or, even worse, the submissive tool of the strongest ones in order to impose their will to the rest of the world? [1] However, has not got the UNO, according to the Charter, a fundamental role to play, especially as a guarantor of the respect for international law?

The CETIM reacts on this issue to the proposals of Secretary General Kofi Annan to reform the U.N. set out in his report published last March. Far from being done in a favourable context, following different revelations about the program "Oil-for-Food", these proposals arise many questions to the CETIM. Is it really a matter of reinforcing the U.N. so it finds again its first vocation that is to serve the peoples? Or rather, to make of it a tool at the most powerful states' service, thus flouting respect of international law and human rights?

Besides, you will find in this newsletter a report about the last session of the Commission on Human Rights, as well as a dossier on the situation of human rights in Iraq, made of abstracts of three interventions that we submitted at the 61st session of the Commission.

[1] See on this regard, our last title: "ONU: droits pour tous ou loi du plus fort? Regards militants sur les Nations Unies".

61st Session of the Commission on Human Rights

The proposed UN reforms (see article below) hung like a cloud over the 61st Session of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) this year (14 March to 22 April 2005) and dampened the atmosphere somewhat. In spite of this, some important decisions were taken during the session: after years of debating the issue, the CHR at long last adopted the "Basic principles and guidelines on the right to a remedy and reparation for victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law". Adopted by 40 votes in favor and none against, the document can be considered to be an important advance in the battle against impunity even though 13 countries abstained from voting, among them the United States, India and Germany.

And then, a resolution on "the right to the truth" first introduced this year and adopted without a vote, provides for the dissemination and the implementation of recommendations issued by "non-judicial mechanisms such as truth and reconciliation commissions". The overall intention seems praiseworthy and national reconciliation necessary; but not at the expense of justice. For, promoting reconciliation without meeting out justice in the countries which are recovering from internal conflict would short-circuit the judicial process and would thus perpetuate impunity. There cannot be true reconciliation if justice hasn't been done.

Based on the premise that mercenaries "are a threat to peace, security and the self-determination of peoples", the CHR decided to set up a working group made up of five experts, on "The use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination". Among its other tasks, this group will have to "The use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination". The resolution was adopted by 35 votes in favor, 15 against and 2 abstentions, with one country not voting. The Western countries, together with Japan, South Korea and the countries of Eastern Europe, voted against the resolution.

At the initiative of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, a resolution was introduced and adopted by 31 in favor, 16 against, 5 abstentions and one country not voting : it deals with libellous statements about religion and asks the Special Rapporteur on Racism to study discrimination directed against muslim and arab populations throughout the world subsequent to the events of 11 September 2001. The Western countries voted against the resolution, arguing that discrimination against other faiths, in particular Christianity, was not covered in the text. India abstained.

The vote on capital punishment (26 in favor, 17 against - including the United States, China and Saudi Arabia – and 10 abstentions) shows that there's still a long way to go before this barbaric practice is abolished.

Economic, social and cultural rights

The resolutions dealing with economic, social and cultural rights, the right to food and the right to health were adopted with one single country voting against: the United States. On other subjects, however, the North-South divide persists, as the voting pattern on the following resolutions shows: the resolution on globalization (38 in favor, 15 against, no abstention), on the foreign debt (33 in favor, 14 against and 6 abstentions), on toxic wastes (37 in favor, 13 against, 2 abstentions, one country not taking part in the vote) on international solidarity (37 in favor, 15 against, 1 abstention), promoting a democratic and equitable international order (32 in favor, 15 against, and 6 abstentions) and on unilateral coercive measures (37 in favor, 14 against, and 2 abstentions).

The resolution on the right to development, which would extend for another year the mandate given to the Intergovernmental Working Group, was adopted with 48 votes in favor, 2 against (Australia and the United States of America) and 2 abstentions: Canada and Japan; one country did not take part in the vote (Gabon).

The standards on TNC's put off *sine die ?*

On Transnational Corporations, the resolution does, it is true, call for a Special Representative of the Secretary General to be appointed; but it hardly manages to disguise the fact that States want the matter to be set aside indefinitely. Thus, the text as adopted totally ignores the work done for the past few years by the experts of the Sub-Commission, as for instance the Draft Norms adopted in 2003. Even though we have been critical of the Draft Standards for its shortcomings, it is nevertheless the only authoritative international instrument available at the present time for the control of the those activities of the TNCs which place human rights in jeopardy.

Furthermore, the spirit of the mandate entrusted to the Special Representative bears an unfortunate resemblance to the *Global Compact*. Nonetheless, the resolution was adopted by 49 votes in favor, 3 against (United States of America, Australia and South Africa), with one abstention (Burkina Faso). The United States and Australia voted against because they oppose any discussion of this issue at the CHR. South Africa and Burkina Faso could not support the text of the resolution. It should be pointed out that the countries which led the lobbying in favor of the text under UK's leadership (Argentina, India, Nigeria and the Russian Federation) did so on the grounds that the text was the result of a compromise, aimed at keeping the issue on the CHR's agenda and at obtaining the support of the United States. Evidently this did not prevent the US from requesting a vote and from voting against the resolution. In any case, we cannot but note that the overwhelming majority of the member States of the Commission gave in to the pressure exerted by big business, and sacrificed the overall interests of their citizens to the interests of an elitist minority in their countries.

As regards the situation in the countries to which the media have been paying special attention - Belarus, Cuba, North Korea and Myanmar - they were this year the only ones to be mentioned in a resolution, aside from Israel which was mentioned in several resolutions under a different agenda item.

Resolution on Guantanamo rejected

The most noteworthy event at the 61st Session was undoubtedly the presentation by Cuba of a resolution which for the first time referred to the conditions of detention at the US naval base at Guantanamo. The resolution asked only that the Governement of the United States invite the mandate-holders of Special Procedures at the CHR to visit the naval base; in spite of its modest scope, the resolution was rejected, 22 countries voting against, 8 in favor and 23 countries abstaining. The Western bloc voted solidly against; while some African and Latin American countries supported the text, as did India, Japan, South Korea and Armenia. Although the resolution was voted down, it was interesting to see the position adopted by various States, especially by members of the European Union who voted against despite the European Parliament's call (see European Parliament Resolution of 28 October 2004, No. P6_ TA(2004) 0050) for an impartial and independent investigation concerning allegations of torture and ill treatment at Guantanamo.

[1] Cf. European Parlement resolution, 28.10.2004, P6_TA(2004)0050.

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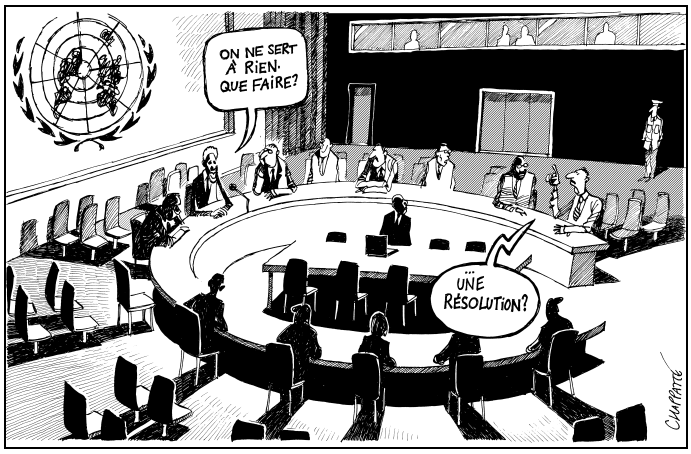

"We don't seem to fill a need; what's the answer ?"
"Draft a resolution ?"
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Comments of the CETIM on the Proposals of U.N. Reform

Reform the Commission on Human Rights?

A bad diagnosis produces a bad remedy

Since the publication on 21 March 2005 of the United Nations Secretary General's Report on the reform of the United Nations [1], the debate has been raging, in particular over the reform of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR), which sits for six weeks each year in Geneva.

Of course, the U.N. in general [2] and the CHR in particular require reform. However, the remedies proposed are, in our opinion, inadequate.

The Secretary General has proposed the elimination of the CHR and its replacement by a Human Rights Council composed of a limited numbers of permanent member states "respectful of human rights" and elected by the General Assembly. He has further proposed that the High Commissioner for Human Rights play "a more active role in the deliberations of the Security Council".

Mr Annan's proposals have triggered numerous reactions, often in support and sometimes going even beyond: some have proposed that the future Human Rights Council sit permanently, that it be composed of independent experts instead of countries and that it be able to condemn countries (in acknowledgement of the ever greater difficulty of doing so at the CHR) and that the High Commissioner for Human Rights present an annual world report.

What is one to think? First of all, giving the elected members of the future Council permanent status is counter to the principle of representativeness and rotation which is a safe guard against arbitrariness and which assures a certain equality among U.N. member states. Moreover, such status would run the risk of becoming dangerous, for the political situation of countries is constantly changing (a country governed by a dictator today could be free from dictatorship tomorrow or vice versa), and the establishment of selection criteria would necessarily suffer from arbitrariness at some point.

Further, if the General Assembly is to elect the members of any given U.N. body, there is then no reason why it should not do so for the other U.N. bodies. In this case, it would be necessary to reconsider the whole U.N. system, which has been based on equal geographic representation since the arrival within it, in the nineteen sixties, of decolonised countries.

Moreover, what would this future body do throughout the entire year, given that there is a well established sharing of tasks among the High Commissioner (who works permanently and who can intervene at any time), the convention oversight bodies (which sit twice a year in order to examine the reports submitted by the signatory states and, in the case of some of them, to receive complaints), the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (which sits once a year in order to carry out numerous studies) and the special procedures of the CHR (which take care of practically all the human rights themes and can be seized throughout the whole year), not to mention the CHR, which can sit in extraordinary session [3] in case of emergency?

Concerning the mandate of the future Council, Mr Annan elaborated on his ideas during his visit to Geneva last April 7. Either he is ill acquainted with the U.N. human rights mechanisms, or he wants to give a fillip to the United States' project to "take in hand" [4] this "thing", in flagrant violation of its charter and the international conventions in this area.

In point of fact, according to the Secretary General, the primary task of the future Council would consist of "evaluating that way in which all the states fulfil their obligations regarding human rights". However, this is the task of the convention oversight bodies, the committees, composed of experts entrusted with verifying the implementation of the ratified conventions by the signatory states.

Condemning states that violate human rights remains a thorny question

In the absence of objective criteria, the principle that might makes right prevails. Those who manage to negotiate alliances avoid a condemnation, whereas others abusively request "technical cooperation" of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to avoid one. But neither the proposal of Kofi Annan nor that of simply replacing the states by experts solves the problem.

It is certainly not credible that an intergovernmental organization sit in judgement on its peers, that the governments voting therein be both judges and accused. It is perhaps precisely because in 1967 the CHR was given the function of judging and convicting member states of the U.N. – instead of leaving this role exclusively to the independent bodies – that the CHR has become so politicised, as is so often deplored. As mentioned above, this future Council would only add selectiveness to arbitrariness.

A Council composed of independent experts would introduce a new problem. One must not forget that the CHR has a subsidiary body, the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, composed of 26 independent experts.

In our opinion, it would be a mistake to create a body without the participation of member state governments, given the nature of the system of "governance" that we have. Moreover, is it necessary – or possible – to do without the governments of member states? The answer is no. One of the primary functions of the CHR is the creation of standards. According to the present system, every new standard must be submitted for the approval of the member states, which must then implement it at the national level. For this reason, it would be opportune to keep the present system, which allows for the participation of member states at all levels of the drafting of international texts.

Is condemnation the only way to remind governments of their obligations? Of course not! There are other mechanisms: the treaty bodies and the special procedures of the CHR. The former are entrusted with overseeing the implementation of the human rights conventions by the signatory states, the latter with overseeing observance of practically all human rights throughout the world. However, there is a hitch, for these mechanisms are greatly lacking in means, and access to some of the convention oversight bodies remains very limited. Further, the problem encountered in practice is a double one: on the one hand the reports and the decisions of these mechanisms are not known to public opinion, and, on the other hand, some signatory states "neglect" to submit their reports to the convention oversight bodies or avoid "inviting" to their countries those in charge of special procedures (the Rapporteurs and Experts named for this purpose and the ad hoc working groups).

Here it is a matter of reinforcing the means at the disposal of these mechanisms and of making their work better known. If, however, it were decided to retain the present system of condemnation of countries, the independent experts of the Sub-Commission could be entrusted with this task instead of being muzzled as happens more and more often.

As for the "more active" role of the High Commissioner for Human Rights within the Security Council, while the proposal may have merit, the sitting of the High Commissioner on the Security Council would likely open the door to transforming human rights into a bargaining tool. The High Commissioner would not have a vote, and her position would be subject to superpower manipulation of the sort that was seen in the case of Iraq and the pseudo "possession of weapons of mass destruction".

With regard to the drafting of an annual report by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, it would compete with the special procedures of the CHR, which cover the whole world. As stressed above, it would be better to strengthen these mechanisms, which currently have only slender means at their disposal. Further, a report prepared by international civil servants, with all due respect for their qualifications and competence, is not necessarily a good idea, whereas the special procedures are conducted by rapporteurs and independent experts answerable only to the CHR.

As for the participation of NGOs, it is mentioned only in passing. However, it is a central question. It is far from certain that the NGOs will have, in the future Council, the same opportunities as in the CHR, for their status is currently under the supervision of the ECOSOC whereas the future council would be under the supervision of the General Assembly. Need one be reminded that the NGOs do not have access to the General Assembly, while their participation and the margin of manoeuvre that they dispose of at the CHR is unique within the U.N. system?

The numerous opinions expressed up to now have been very short on means of improving the human rights mechanisms. On the contrary, these opinions would put those mechanisms in danger, for they seem to have been issued randomly, without taking into account existing mechanisms, as has already been mentioned. Although some parties may be captivated by the proposal of the Secretary General, we believe that eliminating the CHR, with all its faults and imperfections, would be a grave mistake.

The CHR is often accused – and rightly so – of not protecting the victims of human rights violations. The major problem here is the lack of political will on the part of countries sitting on the CHR and the double role they play as both judges and accused. However, the problems will not be solved by making technical changes. What is needed is to review the functioning of the U.N., which is based on countries and not on peoples, contrary to the charter's preamble, countries represented by governments that flout the will of their citizens for the benefit of the interests of a tiny elite. As long as the structures of the U.N. have not been modified to make it truly democratic, any attempt at reform will remain cosmetic.

All the same, given current power relationships, in a world dominated by the United States, by transnational corporations and by neo-liberal economic theory, can one reasonably expect that a reform undertaken in such circumstances might constitute progress for the peoples of the world and for democracy?

* Article published in *Le Courrier* newspaper (Geneva), under the by-line of Malik Özden, 17 May 2005.

[1] Cf. "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005).

[2] In this regard, see "ONU: droits pour tous ou loi du plus fort? Regards militants sur les nations Unies", Editions CETIM, January 2005.

[3] The CHR has met five times in extraordinary session since 1992. These dealt with included Yugoslavia (twice), Rwanda, Palestine and Timor Leste.

[4] Cf. Le Monde, 4 February 2005.

The Position of the CHR Regarding the Reform:

The Western countries refuse a public debate!

The Commission on Human Rights organized an unofficial discussion on the reform. Although numerous countries supported the proposals of the Secretary General, others criticized it. These latter reproached Kofi Annan for neither having consulted the member states nor having respected the competent bodies of the U.N. (the ECOSOC and the CHR). They further expressed the fear of seeing the future Council become a closed, unrepresentative club. Upon completing its work, the CHR decided, through the adoption of a resolution (34 in favor, 15 against, 4 abstentions), to create a working group to consider the proposals of the Secretary General and to make recommendations to the General Assembly. The Western camp voted against this resolution, arguing that informal consultations should be held and not a public meeting on this question. Let us wait and see what the results of this working group are.

Dossier on the situation of human rights in Iraq

The unilateral and warmongering military offensive by the United States and its allies in Iraq in March 2003 is a violation of international law and the UN Charter. It has plunged this country into insecurity and has led to continuous violations of human rights. The CETIM submitted three statements at the HRC to denounce this *de facto* situation and urged the HCR, according to its mandate, to:

1) condemning without ambiguity the violations of international law and humanitarian law which are being committed in Iraq;
2) favoring an inquiry into these violations and bringing their perpetrators to law;
3) favoring a pacific and democratic solution with the participation of all the sectors of the Iraqi people, respecting Iraq's sovereignty and right to self-determination, a solution which requires as condition the immediate withdrawal of the army of occupation;
4) asking that the Iraqis be consulted on the decisions made by the civil administrator during his mandate as well as on Iraq's membership in the World Trade Organization;
5) requesting that an audit be conducted on the use of the moneys managed by the Iraqi Development Fund.

Below you will find some abstracts of these interventions that, on the other hand, are available full version on our site, in the section *the CETIM at the UN*

The situation in Iraq, since the recent invasion, is characterized by an accumulation of human rights violations, without precedent, since the end of the second world war

« The invasion of Iraq, under the false pretext that the regime in place possessed weapons of massive destruction, was a crime of aggression and a crime against peace.

Acts of war committed during an aggression are war crimes, as specified in the Nuremberg Ruling (Judgement) […].

Furthermore, during the aggression against Iraq, different war crimes, sanctioned under international humanitarian law […] were committed : 1) Attacks against civilian populations; 2) Use of prohibited weapons; 3) Massive and prolonged bombing; 4) Attacks against civilian infrastructures; 5) Attacks against communication media and death of journalists. […]

The security council endorsed violations of international law in Iraq

On 22 May 2003, the 14 Member States present (Syria was absent) of the Security Council, unanimously adopted Resolution 1483, based on a project presented by the USA, Great Britain and Spain. […]

It should be noted: 1) that with Resolution 1483, the Security Council, by recognizing the foreign occupation of an independent country, for an indefinite period of time and the appropriation by the occupying forces of its natural resources, in particular its oil, violates fundamental principles of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Covenants on Human Rights. Furthermore, the Security Council accepts that an independent State can be placed in a situation which is inferior to that provided for in Chapters XI and XII of the UN Charter (non-autonomous territories and international regime of fiduciary administration); 2) that the said resolution is in flagrant contradiction with Resolution 1514 (XV) of the UN General Assembly of 14 December 1960 (Declaration on the granting of independence to colonised countries or peoples) which solemnly proclaims: 'Subjection of people to subjugation, to domination and to foreign exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the United Nations Charter and compromises the cause of peace and international cooperation'; 3) that Resolution 1483 officially re-establishes the international custom of wars of aggression, colonialism and neo-colonialism and the systematic pillage of the resources of countries which are victims of these crimes.

On 16 October 2003, the Security Council adopted resolution 1511 which reiterates the legitimacy of the foreign occupation of Iraq. […]

On 30 June 2004, the occupation 'ended'. However, the occupation army, made up of 150,000 men, remains in Iraq because the interim government so requested. The fact that a foreign army of 150,000 is 'invited' to remain on national territory, while this very army occupied the country during a war of aggression and maintains decision making power on the use of force, implies complete renunciation of national sovereignty. […]

A political process imbued with illegitimacy

We are witnessing the establishment of a political process involving fundamental actions for the exercise of sovereignty by the people and the nation of Iraq. […]

The members of the occupation army continue to enjoy legal immunity on Iraqi territory, as established by the occupation authorities Coalition Order No. 17. They benefit therefore from this immunity in the International Criminal Court (ICC) even though the Security Council has not renewed resolutions 1422 and 1487, adopted in 2002 and 2003, which accorded immunity to US occupation troops at the ICC. This immunity in the ICC remains because the USA is not party to the Treaty of Rome. Only the Iraqi government therefore could denounce US citizens at the ICC for crimes committed on its territory, in conformity with Article 12 of ICC statutes. However, that action is prevented by Coalition Order No. 17. The Security Council could also take this action but as we know, the USA can exercise its right of veto.

The elections of 30 January 2005 took place against this background. Further, the climate of insecurity made the presence of foreign observers and the press impossible. Without effective and efficient international control before and during the elections, without internal control by the occupying authorities, with anonymous candidates and without a real electoral campaign, it is impossible to consider that the elections reflect the sovereign will of the Iraqi people. […]".

From the reconstruction to the privatization of Iraq

« Although the United Kingdom - United States coalition, as occupying power, had absolutely no right over Iraq and its resources, the coalition has privatized the bulk of this sovereign country's economy then handed it over to foreign corporations in the name of reconstruction. Paul Bremer, the civil administrator of the Coalition Provisional Authority named by the Bush Administration, during his 13 months in power issued some 100 Coalition Authority Orders. These orders currently function as new national laws without the Iraqi people at any time having consented to them in any way. […]

A veritable legal arsenal was created in order to impose privatization on the national economy and on the public sector for the sole benefit of major foreign corporations. Iraq has become one of the most deregulated economies in the world without any form of protectionism whatever. Many of these laws were inspired moreover by bilateral trade agreements that the United States imposes on their 'partners', such as the NAFTA or the proposed future FTAA [1]. […]

The majority of these orders are in flagrant contradiction to the 1990 Iraqi constitution [2] and to the 1907 Hague Conventions and the Geneva Conventions, ratified by the United States, which both stipulate that the occupying power must respect the laws of the occupied country. They are also in violation of United States law dealing with this subject, to wit The Law of Land Warfare (1956). […]

Opening of the national market to foreign investors and corporations

Among the orders promulgated by the civil administrator is Order 39, which deals with foreign investments. This order plays a leading role in the forced march of Iraq toward a neo-liberal economy. This order, according to its preamble, aims at '…the need for the development of Iraq and its transition from a non-transparent centrally planned economy to a market economy…' In fact, it is designed to deprive future Iraqi authorities of all economic sovereignty and prerogatives. It comports five main points:

1. It allows foreign investors to enjoy exactly the same rights as the Iraqis in developing the national market. Thus, the future government will not be able to favor Iraqi investors or companies. However, it is clear that up until now, United States corporations have enjoyed a position of privilege to the detriment of their Iraqi counterparts;
2. It privatizes the entire Iraqi public sector. Thus, some 200 national companies have been affected: railroads, electricity, water supply and sewerage […];
3. It allows for foreign ownership of up to 100% of Iraqi companies, with the exception of the petroleum industry, mining banks, […];
4. It allows the expatriation or reinvestment of earnings without restriction or tax on the totality of funds invested or financial instruments as well as profits and dividends earned within Iraq. […];
5. It allows the possession of land for 40 years and with the possibility of unlimited renewal of the right to property.

Owing to Order 37, foreign corporations were not taxed in 2003 and have paid taxes of up to only 15% en 2004. […]

Privatization of seeds and the importing of GMOs

A new law allows the patenting of, among other things, living things. Order 81 on 'Patents, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plants Variety' is in complete contradiction to the 1990 Iraqi constitution, which prohibits privately owning biological resources. This order makes illegal the farmers' traditional and millennia-old practice of selecting the best seeds and gives foreign companies a free reign in imposing their patented seeds at their price. […]".

[1] Cf. in this regard the article by Mary Lou Malig, "War: Trade by Other Means" in *Silent War: The US' Economic and Ideological Occupation of Iraq* (Focus on the Global South, January 2005), as well as the most recent CETIM publication "Mobilisations des peoples contre l'ALCA-ZLEA: Traité$ de libre-échange aux Amériques" (Ed. CETIM, 2005, 240 pp.).

[2] The Iraqi constitution has been replaced by a provisional constitution (Transitional Administrative Law) until the new constitution, planned for 2005, is adopted.

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Situation of human rights in Iraq

« The report made by the former acting High Commissioner for Human Rights on the present situation of human rights in Iraq has been submitted to the consideration of the present session [1].

Although this report mentions violations committed by the coalition armed forces present in Iraq, it does not say anything on the use of mercenaries and its consequences to this conflict. Moreover, it blindly believes President Bush's statement of 10th May 2004, on the follow-up of the cases of torture denounced at the Abu Ghraib prison. [...]

On the other hand, the Special Rapporteur on the use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples to self-determination states that 'the soldiers [involved in the practice of torture in Iraq] claimed that they were acting in part under the instruction of private military company interrogators hired by the Pentagon' [2] […]

The question of the use of mercenaries cannot be taken rashly, because it not only destabilizes governments, but it threatens the good functioning of democracy and effective implementation of human rights as well. […]

This is the reason why the CETIM calls upon the Human Rights Commission to pay a special attention on this question and to follow the recommendations made by the Special Rapporteur on the definition of mercenaries to modify the Convention against the recruitment, use, financing and instruction of mercenaries. [3] »

[1] Cf. E/CN.4/2005/4.
[2] Cf. E/CN.4/2005/14.
[3] Cf. Par. 47 of document E/CN.4/2004/15.

CETIM ADVISES YOU THE FOLLOWING READINGS:

Palestine : mémoire et perspectives

Points de vue du Sud

Joint publication, vol. XII (2005), No 1

The contemporary history of the Palestinians resembles a roaring river and an accumulation of ruptures. From the 1904 death of the founder of Zionism, Theodor Herzl, to the Sharon government a century later, this history has been written to the detriment of a people thrown out upon the roads of exile or victim of military occupation. However (and this is one of the curious turns of history), the Palestinians, whom the Zionist leaders have striven to erase from their field of vision, by obliterating them from memory or by drowning them in "the Arab ocean", appear more visible than ever, first and foremost in the role of the "refugees/resistants", then in that of the "occupied" that rebel (intifadah). This emergence from invisibleness has made it possible to unearth the Palestinian collective memory from under the debris of the victors' official history. Current living conditions of the Palestinian population plead for an urgent and just outcome to the conflict, a conflict that cannot be resolved by the explosive formula of "them or us". What is needed is an alternative moral vision that aims to surmount the suffering of the past and of the present, in order to write the pages of a shared future that would end occupation and exile.

193 pages, ISBN: 2-84950-042-9, CETRI, Ed. CETRI / Syllepse, 2005, price to order at the CETIM: CHF 22.50 or € 15.-

Les luttes paysannes et ouvrières face aux défis du XXIe siècle

L'avenir des sociétés paysannes et la reconstruction d'un front uni des travailleurs

Joint publication supervised by Samir Amin

To talk about the workers-peasants alliance may sound as "obsolete" to many European ears. And, nevertheless, considered at a global scale, this question is probably more up-to-date than ever. But it is presented in new terms that usually are different from one place to another. They have in common, above all, the seriousness of the attacks suffered by poor peasants and urban workers in precarious situation all over the world, that is, by the vast majority of people in the planet. The diversity of situations must be, therefore, examined carefully.

Under the direction of Samir Amin, fifteen foreground analysts have used their skill on it. Each of their contributions deserves an attentive reading. Some of the issues tackled are: China, India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Egypt, Ethiopia, West Africa, Zimbabwe and South Africa, Brazil, Poland, Algeria, Nigeria, Uganda….

368 pages, ISBN: 2-84654-089-6, Forum mondial des alternatives, Ed. Les Indes savants, Paris, 2005, on sale at bookshops.