The People Will Build a Better Future for All
Statement of the Campaign for Peoples Goals
On the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
September 24, 2015

Heads of States and Governments will gather at the United Nations (UN) headquarters in New York City to formally adopt a new set of “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) and a “global plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”. This new “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” promises to “transform our world” by 2030 and “end poverty in all its dimensions, irreversibly, everywhere, and leaving no one behind.”

While the UN’s public relations machinery is working overtime to launch this agenda with much fanfare and hype, many people’s organizations and movements are more cautious if not skeptical. Indeed the Campaign for Peoples Goals believes there is every reason to be critical of the Post-2015 development agenda if we examine what States are actually doing on the ground, not what they are declaring in the august halls of the UN.

Many of these same governments pledging to work for these new SDGs are also currently negotiating new “free trade” deals across regions such as the Transpacific Partnership Agreement, Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, Trade-in-Services-Agreement and Economic Partnership Agreements. In contrast to the 2030 Agenda, these so-called 21st century trade agreements are binding and would erect a global legal framework that strengthens corporate rights over people’s rights and the environment. Not only do they strengthen transnational corporate (TNC) control over production and trade of goods and services within and across borders, they also hamper governments from regulating the operations of these TNCs, and prevent underdeveloped countries from actively promoting their own sustainable development. Indeed they would empower TNCs to sue governments for implementing policies that would potentially harm investors’ “rights” to profit even when they are intended to promote the public interest. This would belie governments’ commitment to the realization of human rights and the attainment of the new SDGs.

In negotiating the 2030 Agenda, governments tenaciously avoided committing new public funds to achieve this “bold and ambitious” plan, citing fiscal constraints and justifying the need for more austerity. And yet there was never any serious consideration of cutting back on military spending now running at USD 203 million per hour.¹ The US military budget for 2015 alone is more than twice what is needed to ensure basic life-saving services to every person on the planet.² Yet instead of

spending more on people's health, the world's most powerful countries are spending more on war -- increasing their military expenditure in Eastern Europe, West Asia, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia-Oceania and other regions as they vie for control over oil and other strategic resources and markets. Overt and covert military interventions, wars and the resulting destruction of social infrastructure and livelihoods in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Libya, Yemen, Syria and other countries in the West Asia and North Africa have created the conditions now driving the mass exodus of millions of women, children and men from these regions into Europe.

Not only are States waging wars against the people, they are also complicit with the fossil fuel industries in waging war against the planet. The International Monetary Fund reports that fossil fuel subsidies amount to US$5.3 trillion a year. This sum dwarfs the $100 billion promised by governments annually by 2020 for supporting measures that would mitigate the climate crisis caused by the same fossil fuel industries they are in fact propping up. So much for the 2030 Agenda's promise (Goal 13) to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts."

While many of the wealthy countries continue to fund wars and weapons industries, governments are turning to the private sector to foot the bill for the 2030 Agenda. This makes sense considering that nearly half of global wealth is held by less than 1% of the world's population. Indeed, less than 1% of the aggregate net worth of the world's billionaires is enough to provide an adequate social safety for everyone on the planet. But instead of adequately taxing and redistributing this obscene wealth, governments allow these global elites and their corporations to rob the people in developing countries in excess of $100 billion every year through various tax avoidance schemes, and hide over $21 trillion in tax havens such as Switzerland, London and Delaware in the US.

Moreover, the 2030 Agenda promotes the outsourcing of "development" and public services through so-called Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). These partnerships shift the risks associated with large investments to the public while ensuring huge profits for large corporate investors through various forms of government guarantees and subsidies. Infrastructure development — in power, transport, water and sanitation, agriculture, ICT, and so on—offer up to $7 trillion worth of investment opportunities per year globally.

3 http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/may/18/fossil-fuel-companies-getting-10m-a-minute-in-subsidies-says-imf
4 http://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/oct/14/richest-1percent-half-global-wealth-credit-suisse-report
5 http://www.taxjustice.net/2015/03/26/unctad-multinational-tax-avoidance-costs-developing-countries-100-billion/
Allowing and encouraging private finance to "invest" in development projects such as large infrastructure projects or social services bundled up as new “asset classes” would also intensify pressures for “cost-recovery” and greater commercialization, if not downright privatization of public services. More projects would likely be directed at profitable sectors and facilitating the global production and trading of TNCs rather than prioritizing the needs of impoverished and marginalized sectors. We can expect a more aggressive implementation of mega-infrastructure projects that are often associated with landgrabbing, gentrification, forced evictions, massive displacements and other human rights violations affecting indigenous peoples, campesinos, rural and urban communities, especially but not only in the global South.

In sum, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not an agenda for transformation. It fails to challenge existing relations of power and wealth distribution. It fails to transcend the logic of neoliberalism, capitalist accumulation and imperialism. And while the 2030 Agenda contains much by way of promises, real hope lies elsewhere -- in the people challenging the existing economic and political order that wages war on the people and the planet.

We should continue challenging our governments to:

1. **Uphold the primacy of human rights.** States must be held accountable for ensuring that both their agents and other non-state actors—whether corporations or multilateral institutions—adhere to human rights, including when they operate across borders. FTAs and other international agreements that exact obligations that run contrary to human rights must be declared illegitimate, immoral and therefore void. No international agreement should be negotiated in secret and without public participation or support. Indeed governments must ensure the participation of people and their organizations in decisions that affect their lives and future generations.

2. **Tackle inequality and the overconcentration of wealth.** Governments must implement redistributive and progressive measures to promote equality and solidarity not just “leave no one behind”. Governments must commit to clear targets for achieving more equality in the distribution of incomes and ownership of productive resources including land, finance, technology, services, and industries. Governments should commit to promoting and scaling up solidarity-based, traditional, collective and public forms of ownership, especially for women and other marginalized groups in society. The international community should cancel all illegitimate debts of countries, remedy unfair trade and taxation regimes that rob poorer countries of trillions of dollars a year, and stop the unsustainable extraction of resources from underdeveloped countries.
3. **Rein in corporate power.** Governments should adopt a strong independent regulatory framework for business and the financial sector to ensure that they respect human rights and are held accountable when they do not. Rather than rely on corporate self-regulation and voluntarism, governments must enforce right-to-know provisions and mandatory public disclosure for multinational corporations; require independent accounting of their production and commercial operations as well as independent technology assessments; require participatory human rights impact assessments; free prior and informed consent for indigenous peoples; establish mechanisms for redress; and penalties for corporate infractions and violations of human rights and nature.

4. **Solve the climate crisis.** Governments should commit to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C through drastic emission cuts and fair-sharing of the global carbon budget that takes into account per capita historical emissions, without resorting to carbon trading or offsets. This must be accompanied by clear commitments on the delivery of adequate and appropriate climate finance and technology for adaptation and mitigation actions in the South. The burden of this transition must be borne by the advanced industrialized countries, the biggest corporations and the wealthiest classes globally and within each country that have exploited people and the planet the most.

5. **Stop militarization and war.** Governments should put a cap on military spending and progressively reduce this in order to promote sustainable development, social justice, and lasting peace. This should cover public resources spent on the entire military-industrial-academic complex – composed of the state’s budget for the armed forces as well as for contracts with corporate suppliers of weapons systems and services, and academic institutions that conduct research on weapon systems and designs. These resources should be progressively reallocated to essential services for the people including health, education, housing, environmental protection and regeneration, and so on.

These are but minimum reforms that governments and the international community must do to make any meaningful impact on the conditions that breed poverty, inequality, environmental destruction, violence and multiple crises.

But it remains up to the people to challenge the prevailing unjust system and those who benefit from and preserve this status quo. It is up to us to build a new and better world for all.