

Copenhagen: Chávez and Morales Lash Out at Industrialised North

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COPENHAGEN (IPS/TerraViva) Presidents Evo Morales of Bolivia and Hugo Chávez of Venezuela had harsh words for rich countries Wednesday, accusing them of driving the COP 15 talks to the brink of failure out of “selfishness” and supporting a “culture of death.”

“The scientifically sustainable goal of reducing polluting gas emissions and achieving a long-term cooperation agreement clearly seems, here and now, to have failed,” the Venezuelan leader told the climate change summit.

“And for what reason? We have no doubt that it is due to the irresponsible attitude and lack of political will of the most powerful nations. Let no one be offended; I quote the great José Gervasio Artigas (the Uruguayan liberation hero): ‘con libertad no ofendo ni temo’ (with freedom, I neither offend nor fear anyone),” he added.

Tension continued to rise in Copenhagen Wednesday as the standoff over a new regime of emissions reductions remained in place and security around the Bella Center, the conference venue, was tightened ahead of the arrival of heads of state and government.

NGOs loudly protested Wednesday over the expulsion of several of their representatives from the conference for “security reasons,” and activists clashed with police.

Meanwhile, the resignation of the conference chairwoman, Connie Hedegaard, only exacerbated the climate of uncertainty.

Against this backdrop, Chávez accused the richest nations of “selfishness” and “political conservatism,” as well as of “a high degree of insensitivity and a lack of solidarity with the poorest, the hungry and the most vulnerable.”

“I would like to remind you that the 500 million richest people in the world, that is, seven percent of the world’s population, are responsible for 50 percent of polluting emissions, while the poorest 50 percent are only responsible for seven percent of emissions,” he said.

The Venezuelan president also summed up the global environmental situation.

“Sixty percent of the planet’s ecosystems are damaged. Twenty percent of the Earth’s soil is degraded. We have been impassive witnesses of deforestation, land use conversion, desertification, alteration of freshwater systems, over-exploitation of ocean resources, pollution and the loss of biodiversity,” he said.

“Over-intensive land use is 30 percent above our capacity to recover that land. The planet is losing its ability to regulate itself,” he added.

Chávez stressed that the Venezuelan government would reject any draft text to come “out of

nowhere,” alluding to the controversial Danish advance document leaked last week, and that it would only approve an agreement arising from the negotiating tracks of the Kyoto Protocol and the Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Minutes earlier, at a press conference, the Bolivian president had also expressed tough criticism of the richest countries for what he called the lack of transparency at COP 15.

“There is permanent manipulation going on here: documents appear, and decisions are made selectively without including governments who have brought proposals from their people. It cannot be countenanced that this manipulation should be used to impose a model that represents a culture of death,” Morales said.

Flanked by members of the Bolivian delegation and representatives of indigenous peoples, Morales condemned the “Western model and capitalist way of life” that promote consumerism and the destruction of nature.

“We come from a culture of life, and the Western model represents the culture of death. At this summit we must decide whether we are on the side of life or on the side of death,” he said.

“This is not simply an environmental or financial problem; it is a question of different models of life. This is a profound difference we have with the Western model. (Climate change) is not a cause but an effect: the effect of the capitalist way of life,” he said.

Morales urged rich countries to pay their “climate debt,” and proposed a series of measures to be considered by COP 15.

The first is to approve a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth, a proposal he had already presented to the United Nations.

“In the past century our black and indigenous ancestors were treated as slaves, and their rights were not recognised. In a similar way, now our Mother Earth is being treated as a lifeless object, as if she had no rights,” Morales told the press.

“We have to abolish the slavery of Mother Earth. It is unacceptable for her to be the slave of capitalist countries. If we don’t end this, we can forget about life,” he stated categorically.

Morales also demanded that the countries of the North pay reparations for the “present and future harm” arising from climate change, and “return atmospheric space” to developing countries.

“It is unacceptable that the atmosphere should belong to only a few countries for their development, and that these countries with their irrational industrialisation should have filled it up with their greenhouse gas emissions. To pay back this debt, they must reduce and absorb those gases so that the atmosphere is distributed equitably,” he said.

Finally, he called on industrialised nations to take in all those persons who are forced to emigrate because of global warming.

“I think that on this issue, our African brothers, our indigenous brothers, have more than enough moral and ethical authority to demand it. Formerly, we have been invaded and plundered.” he said.

P.S.

* From IPS/TerraViva):

<http://www.ips.org/TV/copenhagen/chavez-and-morales-last-out-at-industrialised-north/>