

## **IBON warns vs diluting Rio+20 draft: 'Don't delete our rights, don't bracket our futures!'**

As the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) draws near, negotiations on the zero draft of its outcome document have markedly heated up. From March 19 to 23, the first round of "informal-informal" (preliminary) negotiations on the zero draft of the outcome document was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City, NY.

Further, the third open-ended informal intersessional meeting of the Preparatory Committee for UNCSD will be held from March 26 to 27 in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Chamber of the North Lawn Building of the UN Headquarters. Members of permanent missions, government delegates, representatives of international organizations and civil society actors are expected to attend the meeting.

Paul Quintos of IBON International is currently attending the informal-informal negotiations and the intersessional as one of civil society representatives, as well as participating in several side events of the UNCSD main event. On March 23, Quintos delivered the following remarks at the side event entitled "Towards the Peoples' Summit at Rio+20" held at the ECOSOC Chamber of the UN Headquarters in New York.

### **Deleting our rights, bracketing our future Why we need a People's Summit**

By Paul Quintos  
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I think the best way to appreciate the people's summit in Rio is to look at what's happening here in this hall over the last few days.

Here we have been witnessing a systematic attempt by some powerful states to weaken, or "bracket," or outright eliminate nearly all references to human rights obligations and equity principles in the text for the outcome of Rio+20.

Let's take the section on Food.

Text that refers to the "Right to food and proper nutrition" – delete, says one major power.

"Right of everyone to have access to safe, sufficient and nutritious food..." – Bracket it!

But increasing agricultural productivity is fine. Improving access of small farmers to global markets is fine.

Text that says, "Specific attention must be paid to challenges faced by poor smallholders, women and youth including their participation in decision-making..." – Delete!

"Promoting access to land particularly for women, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups..." – Bracket or delete!

But “promoting open and transparent markets; ... promoting secure rights to land and natural resources...” – by “secure rights” they mean property rights – that is fine for them!

“Regulating financial and commodity markets to address price volatility...” – Delete!

The same story goes for water.

“Right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation...” – Delete!

But they agree to “efforts to improve access” because they can always say that they are privatizing water utilities in order to encourage private investments and therefore improve access – whereas insistence on rights assigns the duty to the state.

“Improving efficiency...” – even better.

But it’s not just human rights that are under attack. Even principles already agreed upon in Rio in 1992 are being bracketed – the Polluter Pays Principle, Precautionary Principle, Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR).

CBDR is particularly contentious with major developed countries trying to eliminate any and all prescriptive language that would commit them to the provision of finance, technology transfers and capacity building in support of sustainable development effort in the South.

All references to the Right to Development are being eliminated.

Language hinting at the need for reforms of International Financial Institutions, the multilateral trading system, the big banks – they are dismissed as being beyond the remit of Rio. What happened to integrating the three pillars!

And it’s also hypocrisy because at UNCTAD, which clearly has the mandate to push for reforms in the international trade, financial and development regime, there are also ongoing attempts by many of these same powerful states to remove any concrete and meaningful reform proposals in the outcome document for the UNCTAD XIII next month.

Here in the UNCSD, even the goal of poverty eradication is being qualified to focus only on extreme poverty.

The powerful states are consistently opposing prescriptive language – in other words, language that commits governments to actually do what they claim to support in principle. On the other hand, they are pushing for private sector investments and initiatives to fill in the gap left by the public sector.

They are even avoiding concrete targets and timelines or even just defining the Green Economy. And I think this is deliberate. Because by keeping the definition open or vague enough, you can promote biofuels, or nuclear energy, or carbon trading, or financialization of natural resources, or geo-engineering, etc. as Green Economy measures.

So if all of these attempts by powerful states to remove rights, eliminate equity, whittle down Rio principles, and avoid concrete commitments to meaningful reforms in social, economic and environmental policies and governance succeed, then what are we left with?

CSOs and social movements are already asking the question whether we are better off with a weak agreement in Rio or no agreement at all.

There is a narrative emerging from these negotiations that can only be understood in the current global context. This is happening in the middle of the gravest crisis of the global capitalist system since the Great Depression of the previous century.

Capital is desperately seeking new investment outlets, new markets, new sources of raw materials and new ways of squeezing more profits from the toil of working people.

But they can't privatize if we assign clear obligations on states to ensure universal access to water and so on, which is what rights imply.

They can't make as much money out of green technologies if we require technology assessments based on the precautionary principle.

They can't easily expand to biofuel plantations if we have too many safeguards in place, like respecting customary land use rights and practices of indigenous peoples.

They can't speculate on commodities and derivatives if we have financial regulations.

They can't talk about equity without us talking about the obscene concentration of wealth, or capital in the hands of a global financial oligarchy today, which is precisely at the root of the current crisis, the decline in aggregate demand, the surfeit of capital that therefore go to financial speculation rather than in the real economy, inflating asset bubbles and leading to financial crises and all its attendant consequences.

They can't aim for ever expanding capital accumulation if we insist on the redistribution of resources and environmental space within planetary boundaries.

That's why we need the people's summit!

Because here is the space where the people can more freely and openly discuss and question the fundamental underpinnings of the global economic and political order; embrace new paradigms for "development" and sustainability; and explore truly transformative solutions, not the false solutions that we've been hearing all week.

But we can't completely abandon this space either. We have to send a resounding message to our purported leaders that we will not allow them to "delete" our rights and "bracket" our futures. We must not allow them to backtrack on the Rio principles and on human rights obligations. We must make it clear to them that this is not the future we want!#