

Gravediggers of imperialism: International conference to decolonize the world

written by John Parker
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Front row from left: Estelí Capote Maldonado, General Coordinator, Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales; Kandis A. N. Sebro, Operational

Secretary, Alba Movements Continental Assembly of Caribbean Peoples; Berta Joubert-Ceci, Women's International Democratic Federation, contributor to Struggle-La Lucha; Maggie Vascassenno, co-coordinator of Women in Struggle/Mujeres en Lucha; Carlos Alicea Negrón, Movimiento Ñin Negrón. Back row from left: Jihad Abdul Mumit, former political prisoner, International Peoples' Senate, National Jericho Movement; Ahmed Aminu-Ramatu Yusuf, co-host of SIRA conference; Roberto A. Alzaga, Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales; John Parker, Socialist Unity Party; Edwin Cortés, former Puerto Rican political prisoner; Owei Lakemfa, President of SIRA, Convenor of conference; Kazi Toure; former political prisoner, International Peoples' Senate, National Jericho Movement.

Abuja, Nigeria, Aug. 14 — The Society for International Relations Awareness (SIRA) Conference on Aug. 12-13 in Abuja, Nigeria, served as a powerful testament of solidarity and commitment for peoples fighting for self-determination. The theme was "The Forgotten Peoples: International Conference to Decolonize the World."

Today's most dangerous period of the push towards World War III by Western imperialism - led by U.S. imperialism, which also leads NATO - can only succeed with the participation and obedience of the former colonized and neocolonized governments and peoples.

However, this conference makes it clear that the anti-imperialist organizations, activists, and youth in the colonized orbit will more likely become the gravediggers of the imperialists.

Owei Lakemfa, the current president of SIRA with a long history of struggle in leading and writing about labor unions and human rights, gave a welcome to the conference: "We feel the United Nations has not been fast enough, even though they promised to decolonize countries since 1960. So, we decided to bring the people of the colonies as well as the people of the colonial masters together to agree on a

possible time frame, or framework, or action plan. ...

"With about 61 non-self-governing territories in the world and about 17-18 by the UN, we want to see how many of them can be decolonized within the next 4 to 6 years."

Occupation of Western Sahara

Western imperialism has and continues to encourage division among the colonized and neocolonized nations. The Spanish-enabled, long-standing occupation of Western Sahara by Morocco is one of those contradictions of the colonized becoming colonizers. Morocco was also a victim of French and British colonialism.

Lakemfa explained that the issue has deep roots, dating back to Spain's controversial decision to hand over Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania during decolonization.

"While Mauritania eventually withdrew, Morocco maintained its grip on the territory, leaving the Sahrawi people scattered across occupied lands and refugee camps in Algeria."

The keynote address was presented by Western Sahara Ambassador Oubi Bachir, representative of the POLISARIO Liberation Movement to the UN and Geneva:

"I would assume that you all know that Western Sahara is known to be the last colony in Africa," said Bachir, "because it is still listed within the UN list of countries to be decolonized," but Morocco's "Plan A was to militarily occupy the territory by exterminating the people."

By 1991, however, Bachir states that the Sahara's military resistance forced Morocco to appear to accept the UN plan that was calling for a referendum for self-determination. But Morocco reverted to military attacks against Western Sahara.

Bachir pointed out that the responsibility of the European Union, the U.S., and the African Union is to assist in the self-determination of Western Sahara. “The people of Western Sahara are the ones and only ones entitled to determine the final fate of the territory of the Western Sahara,” said Bachir.

Solidarity with Cuba

The Ambassador of the Republic of Cuba, Miriam Morales Palmero, was well received. She spoke about solidarity with Nigeria and their common interests in ending the U.S. blockade of Cuba as well as the U.S. classification of Cuba as a State Sponsor of Terrorism. Palmero received a chant of solidarity from participants in the conference and recognition of Fidel Castro’s birth on Aug. 13, the day she spoke.

The previous day, opening remarks were made by the chairperson of the conference - Professor Ibrahim Gambari - former UNICEF President, ex-Nigeria Foreign Affairs Minister, and past Chair of the UN Special Committee Against Apartheid and Envoy on Cyprus, Zimbabwe, and Myanmar: “As long as many people remain not free under colonialism, none of us can consider ourselves free,” said Gambari.

“The freedom of all oppressed people, colonized people is paramount; without it, international peace and security are truly endangered,” he continued.

“United resolutions are plenty in terms of supporting the end of colonialism, but they don’t self-implement; therefore, we really have to organize to make sure those territories under colonial rule or not self-governing must be independent as soon as possible.”

Jihad Abdul Mumit, former political prisoner and member of the Jericho Movement, USA, echoed this sentiment in his statement to the conference: “The point and opportunity here is to continue to build better and stronger networks to educate, uplift, and represent the people. It is our duty to develop a plan. It is our duty to

fight against genocide, colonialism, and all forms of oppression. It is our duty to respect each other. It is our duty to struggle to win.”

Maggie Vascassenno, co-coordinator of Women in Struggle/Mujeres en Lucha, USA, referenced the Nigerian struggles today: “Women In Struggle is inspired by and in solidarity with the young people and workers here in Abuja and cities throughout Nigeria who are fighting against soaring inflation, hunger and poverty. We demand an end to the brutal repression which includes not only the deaths of those fighting against capitalist price gouging but also the mass jailings in Nigeria. We embrace the demands of the mass movement #EndBadGovernanceInNigeria.”

End colonization of Puerto Rico

The struggle to end the colonization of Puerto Rico within the U.S. was a major focus of this conference. Edwin Cortes, a former Puerto Rican political prisoner who spent 14 years in prison and who also spoke on behalf of former political prisoner Oscar Lopez Rivera, expressed how it created a desire for struggle. “Since the 1970s, we have been and continue to be moved by many liberation struggles, including in Algeria, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, as well as the Tupamaros in Uruguay, the FMLN in El Salvador, July 26 Movement in Cuba, Nicolas Maduro and United Socialist Party of Venezuela, Palestine, among others.

“Oscar Lopez Rivera was born in Puerto Rico and, as part of a colonial economic forced migration, moved to the United States in the 1950s. He was conscripted into the U.S. armed forces and sent to Vietnam, where his eyes were opened to the anti-colonial struggle of the Vietnamese people. Oscar returned to the streets of Chicago with an anti-colonial vision to uplift the lives of our people struggling in the community and for the development of new campaigns for Puerto Rico’s self-determination and independence.”

This writer, a member of the Socialist Unity Party, spoke on the denial of self-determination taken from the Global South by the World Bank and IMF, which is dominated by the U.S. Their role in denying infrastructure only brings poverty and inflation — fueled by the U.S. wars, proxy wars and military terrorism in Africa.

Kandis A. N. Sebro, Alba Movements Continental Assembly of the Caribbean People: also spoke about the underdevelopment of infrastructure exposed in 1968: "As the Guyanese intellectual Walter Rodney highlighted, colonialist expansion was done with a view to exploit our resources, and the Caribbean was therefore structurally organized to foster the development of industrial countries predominantly in Europe — or the mainland."

In addition, Sebro explained: "Social domination also included the renunciation of self in various ways such as through language and culture. This phenomenon is addressed by Frantz Fanon in his book, 'Black Skin, White Mask' where Caribbean people are constantly taught that elements of their culture are primitive and worthless."

The violence of the Western imperialist countries is today very visible with technology and the unprecedented killing of children and Palestinians in Gaza by Israel's most heinous and monstrous genocide — armed and funded by the U.S. And the genocide against African peoples, on the continent, and in the diaspora, continues to increase its violence.

Kazi Toure, former political prisoner and member of the National Jericho Movement, USA, was a witness to the state executions against the Black liberation movement: "When a child goes to school, he or she must place their hand over their heart, turn to the flag, and pledge allegiance to the flag of the U.S. - the same happens at every major sports event. ...

"I stopped pledging when I was 13. Medgar Evers was murdered when I was 14.

Brother Malcolm was assassinated when I was 15. The Black Panther Party was born when I was 16 and Martin Luther King was murdered when I was 18. ... The counterintelligence program of the FBI, known as Cointelpro, infiltrated and destroyed every Black, Brown, and Indigenous organization that worked to better their communities and nations. Twenty-eight young people in the Black Panther Party were murdered by 1974, to the party's demise."

Berta Joubert-Ceci, a member of the Women's International Democratic Federation and a regular contributor to Struggle-La Lucha, gave a very informative presentation at the conference that highlighted the economic violence against Puerto Rico:

"In 2015, the Krueger Report, an IMF neoliberal prescription, was published: 'Puerto Rico a way forward.' The 30-page report provides a detailed study of the economy of the colony and its practices ... some of the measures of this five-year plan are:

- Elimination of the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, which it says is too high
- Reduction of the number of teachers and consolidation (closing) of schools; reduction of funding to the University of Puerto Rico, etc.

"It also includes privatization of public agencies such as the PUR Electric Power Authority, and other government agencies that are efficiently generating income as the State Insurance Fund. These facts point to the urgency of decolonization now."

Estelí Capote, General Coordinator, Instituto Puertorriqueño de Relaciones Internacionales, talked about how organizations working through the UN committees could also push Puerto Rico's independence and self-determination.

"For example, during the early 2000s, Puerto Rico had a big struggle in taking out the U.S. military from Vieques that was bombarding heavily the island resulting in contamination, displacement of population, the sickness of the population, death of

personnel ... this is the type of issue that the 4th Commission can work on. It is important for Puerto Rico to have a presence in this 4th Commission specially through our sister country of Cuba ... with all the economic blockage and political restriction imposed by the U.S., they have continued to be very strict in their determination to fulfill the Jose Marti and Fidel Castro commitment to foster Puerto Rican independence."

Owei Lakemfa and Estelí Capote - the key organizers - brought together an extremely successful conference that ended with the direction of work and the recognition of a significant and inspiring date of birth. Said Capote: "This is the first of a series of consecutive, consistent events to be celebrated until the objective of this body is obtained. The participants recognized today, Aug. 13, Fidel Castro's birthday, the vital and inspirational energy of the great revolutionary of the world, sustaining and providing guidance in the process of debating and agreeing collectively on the objectives and goals of this conference."

