

brics-from-below!

join a civil society summit during the

Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa

heads-of-state summit in Durban, March 22-27

with

groundWork, Friends of the Earth-South Africa (<http://www.groundwork.org.za>)

the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (<http://www.sdcea.co.za>)

and the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society (<http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za>)

In Durban, South Africa, five heads of state meet in late March, to assure the rest of Africa that their countries' corporations are better investors in infrastructure, mining, oil and agriculture than the traditional European and US multinationals. The Brazil-Russia-India-China-SA (BRICS) summit has invited 25 heads of state from Africa, many of whom are notorious tyrants. ***Given how much is at stake, critical civil society must scrutinise the claims, the processes and the outcomes of the BRICS summit and its aftermath.*** In Durban, three local organisations with a strong track record of advocacy and research on social, economic and ecological justice propose several events between 22-27 March, with the aim of raising critical voices so that long-overdue social, ecological, political, economic and other rights-related concerns are no longer ignored by BRICS leaders.

critical voices must be heard

Critics point to four groups of problems in all the BRICS:

- *socio-economic rights violations*, including severe inequality, poverty, unemployment, disease, inadequate education and healthcare, costly basic services and housing, constraints on labour organising, and extreme levels of violence, especially against women (such as the high-profile rapes/murders of a Delhi student last December 16, and in BRICS host South Africa of Anene Booysen on February 2 in Bredasdorp, Western Cape and Reeva Steenkamp on February 14);
- *political and civil rights violations*, such as increased securitisation of societies, militarisation and arms trading, prohibitions on protest, rising media repression and official secrecy, debilitating patriarchy and homophobia, activist jailings and torture, and even massacres (including in Durban where a notorious police hit squad killed more than 50 suspects in recent years);
- *regional domination by BRICS economies*, including extraction of hinterland raw materials, and through BRICS promotion of 'Washington Consensus' ideology which reduces poor countries' policy space (for example, in the recent donation of \$100 billion to the International Monetary Fund with the mandate that the IMF be more 'nasty', according to South Africa's finance minister in a 2011 radio interview, or in the desire of China, Brazil and India to revitalise the World Trade Organisation so as to maximise their own trading power against weaker economies); and
- *'maldevelopment' based on elite-centric, consumerist, financialised, eco-destructive, climate-insensitive, nuclear-powered strategies* which advance corporate and parastatal profits, but which create multiple crises within all the BRICS (as witnessed in South Africa during the Marikana Massacre carried out by police on behalf of Lonmin platinum corporation last August, and in South Durban where \$30 billion in white-elephant state infrastructure subsidies for chaotic port, freight and petrochemical industry expansion – and more labour-broking exploitation – are being vigorously resisted by victim communities).

Confusingly to some, BRICS regimes carry out this agenda quite consistently at the same time they offered radical, even occasionally 'anti-imperialist' rhetoric accompanied by mainly trivial diplomatic actions. Their growing alliance is not entirely coherent, of course, as observed in the interface between BRICS and the Bretton Woods Institutions where there has been no consensus on leadership choices. In the UN Security Council, the BRICS exhibit opposing self-interests as they seek greater power *for themselves, not the collective*: repeated bids for permanent membership by India, Brazil and South Africa do not get support from Russia and China. Another case of differing BRICS interests was the humiliation suffered by South African society when Beijing ordered Pretoria's Home Affairs Minister (now African Union chairperson) Nkozasana Dlamini-Zuma *not to issue a simple visa to the Dalai Lama to attend Archbishop Tutu's 80th birthday party in 2011, or attend a 2009 Tibet solidarity gathering in SA.*

BRICS in Durban: a new corporate carve-up of Africa

Meanwhile, the African continent has been overwhelmed by BRICS corporations. The rate of trade between Africa and the major emerging economies – especially China – rose from 5 to 20 percent of all commerce since 1994, when apartheid ended. In this context, facilitating economic relationships with the continent is one of the South African government's leading objectives, according to deputy foreign minister Marius Fransman: 'South Africa also presents a gateway for investment on the continent, and over the next 10 years the African continent will need \$480 billion for infrastructure development.'

But highly destructive 'Resource Curse' maldevelopment often follows such infrastructure. This is also true, geopolitically, when it comes to protecting BRICS investments. In January 2013, for example, Pretoria deployed 400 troops to the Central African Republic during a coup attempt because *'We have assets there that need protection,'* according to deputy foreign minister Ebrahim Ebrahim, referring to minerals. Allegations have been made by a former South African official that these mineral interests include uranium arranged via corrupt heads-of-state collaboration. The most extreme such case is probably Zimbabwe, where Chinese firms prop up a military junta that in turn props up President Robert Mugabe's rule, together looting the country of billions of dollars worth of diamonds.

In 2010, 17 out of Africa's top 20 companies were South African, even after extreme capital flight from Johannesburg a decade earlier, which saw firms like Anglo American, De Beers, SA Breweries and Old Mutual relocate to London. Their post-apartheid role as *'new imperialists'* was of *'great concern'*, according to leading South African politician Jeff Radebe (now Minister of Justice): *'There are strong perceptions that many South African companies working elsewhere in Africa come across as arrogant, disrespectful, aloof and careless in their attitude towards local business communities, work-seekers and even governments.'*

The traditional SA, US, European, Australian and Canadian firms in Africa have recently been joined by major firms from China, India and Brazil. Their work has mainly built upon colonial infrastructural foundations – road, rail, pipeline and port expansion – for the sake of plantations, minerals, petroleum and gas extraction.

But while South African business has been insensitive and greedy, so too have government officials complied, first with the (failed) New Partnership for Africa's Development, which was said to be 'philosophically spot on' by the Bush Administration, and African Peer Review Mechanism. More recently, South Africa's National Development Plan – overseen from within the Presidency and endorsed at the ANC's December 2012 national conference – conceded that there is a *'perception of the country as a regional bully, and that South African policy-makers tend to have a weak grasp of African geopolitics.'*

climate crisis and a new BRICS Bank

Indeed it is evident how much South African – and other BRIC countries' – *elite* policy interests conflict with those of the African hinterland when it comes to climate management. The climate crisis could kill 185 million Africans unnecessarily this century, according to Christian Aid. But South Africa's post-apartheid government not only increased the country's greenhouse gas emissions levels – from what is known as the 'Minerals-Energy Complex' – to levels far higher than apartheid's, but actively colluded with Washington to destroy effective multilateralism. In a small room alongside Barack Obama in December 2009, the leaders of the 'BASIC' bloc – Brazil, South Africa, India and China – helped to destroy the Kyoto Protocol at the United Nations Copenhagen climate summit. As Bill

McKibbin of 350.org put it, the five leaders 'wrecked the UN' by imposing a non-binding agreement that would raise average world temperatures four degrees this century, though far higher yet in Africa.

As for the 'Durban Platform' signed at the 2011 UN climate summit, it *'was promising because of what it did not say,'* according to US State Department adviser Trevor Houser (in the *New York Times*): *'There is no mention of historic responsibility or per capita emissions. There is no mention of economic development as the priority for developing countries. There is no mention of a difference between developed and developing country action.'* The Durban deal has severely limited poor countries' ability to defend against climate disaster.

There is similar collusion between BRICS and Washington when it comes to global finance, for in July 2012, the former countries' treasuries sent \$100 billion in new capital to the IMF, which was seeking new systems of bail-out for banks exposed in Europe. As suffered repeatedly by Africa since the early 1980s, the resulting austerity in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Ireland and other economies still unravelling does far more harm than good to both local and global economies. With respect to power within the IMF, the result of this BRICS intervention was that China gained dramatically more voting shares, while Africa actually lost a substantial fraction of its share.

BRICS interventions to be discussed in Durban are more dangerous yet. A new BRICS Development Bank would likely exacerbate the human, ecological and economic messes caused by multilateral financing, given the deplorable track record of precedent institutions in Brazil, China and South Africa. Africa will become an even more violent battleground for internecine conflicts between emerging markets intent on rapid minerals and oil extraction, as is common in central Africa where an estimated five million lives have been lost.

Specific BRICS companies have been targeted by victims, and require unified civil society campaigning and boycotts to generate solidaristic counter-pressure, whether Brazil's Vale and Petrobras, or South Africa's Anglo or BHP Billiton (albeit with London and Melbourne headquarters), or India's Tata or Arcelor-Mittal, or Chinese state-owned firms and Russian energy corporations.

brics-from-below!

In this context, building a bottom-up civil society network to research, analyse, watchdog and represent silenced voices of dissent has never been more important. To assist in building such a network, join us from 22-27 March:

Friday 22 March:

* 7-10pm **UKZN Time of the Writer** festival panel (Sneddon Theatre at Howard College Campus), with a focus on **progressive critiques of SA political economy and social culture**, in conjunction with ***brics-from-below***

Saturday 23 March:

* ***brics-from-below*** free morning at Fairvale High School in Wentworth, South Durban (next to Engen oil refinery), with rooms available for meetings, seminars, etc

* 1-6pm: **Teach-Out, Teach-In in South Durban** at the main Fairvale High School hall, aiming to educate ***brics-from-below*** visitors about adverse conditions in SA communities, and visitors educate SA about their struggles

* 6-10pm: Cultural event to entertain ***brics-from-below*** and link African counter-hegemonic culture with music

Sunday 24 March:

* meeting times/places available for ***brics-from-below*** visitors at Diakonia church centre in central Durban

* ***brics-from-below*** **Reality Tours** of Durban (various sites being organised along with inexpensive transport)

Monday 25 March:

* Diakonia as main site for ***brics-from-below*** **summit, Day 1** - *specific eco-social-labour struggles within BRICS?*

* evening event will be a public debate between ***brics-from-below*** and BRICS corporations

Tuesday 26 March:

* Diakonia as main site for ***brics-from-below*** **Summit, Day 2** - *what are BRICS doing in Africa and at global scale?*

* a special series of talks will occur on the **BRICS Development Bank** arranged by Mais Democracia (Brazil NGO)

* flights from Durban to the **World Social Forum** in Tunisia leave as late as 7pm, arriving in Tunis at 1pm

* evening event (including WSF video link) with public debate between ***brics-from-below*** and BRICS leaders

Wednesday 27 March:

- * Diakonia as main morning site for *brics-from-below* meetings of visiting groups
- * *brics-from-below* to visit International Convention Centre around lunchtime
- * Diakonia could be available for follow-up *brics-from-below* afternoon/evening meetings

Thursday 28 March onwards:

- * there are plenty of free or inexpensive sites in Durban to continue network meetings and events

where does it all happen?

MARCH 22: UKZN Sneddon Theatre hosts *Time of the Writer*

MARCH 23: South Durban hosts *brics-from-below*

MARCH 24-27: Diakonia, City Hall and ICC



Portuguese version provided by *More Democracy Institute*

