

Current Concerns

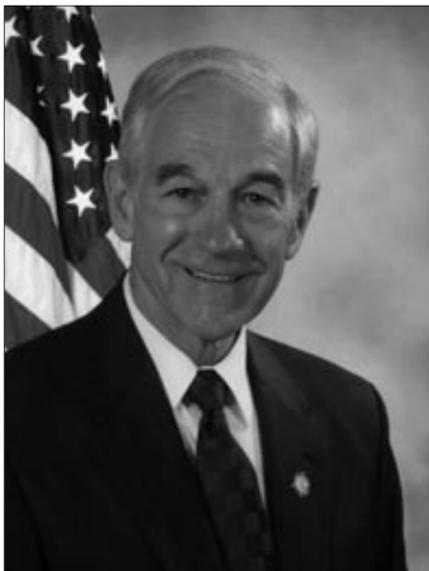
The international journal for independent thought, ethical standards, moral responsibility, and for the promotion and respect of public international law, human rights and humanitarian law

English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

US Foreign Politics Continues to be Led in the Neocon Spirit

An interview with the Republican Congressman Ron Paul about the forthcoming bankruptcy of the US and the threatening Iran war

by Jihan Hafiz



Dr Ron Paul, House representative of the 14th district of Texas

cc. Until today, little is to be heard from western economic and government circles about their fundamental reflections on the current economic crisis. One is missing some more ethics, some more sense of responsibility, less liberalization course, some more control – however, everything seems to follow the same old direction. The crisis did not fall into their lap, it had been forecast for some years – but nothing happened. It began – and instead of starting fundamental considerations, the costs are imposed on the taxpayers of the countries, and the perpetrators try to make cash before the whole system breaks down completely.

As long as the link to the string pullers of the disastrous financial system is not cut, the economies of the peoples are kept on the leash of the string pullers. The other possibility – already happening here and there – is to start ignoring this system of centralistic welfare teachings and to develop one's own alternatives.

A man who very early lifted the warning finger, is US congressman Ron Paul. He describes the whole fraud basis of what calls itself the "world financial system", which is at the same time the cause of devastating unfairness and disastrous wars. His suggestion to dissolve the Federal Reserve Bank (Fed) would equal a release and offer a possible approach to a new financial and economic system.

In the following we reprint the interview with Ron Paul done by Press TV. Although it was broadcast as early as 27 December 2008, it did not suffer a loss in topicality. In the introductory remarks Press TV presents Paul as "a unique conservative politician who wants an end to US military presence on foreign soil, advocates US withdrawal from the UN, NATO and NAFTA (North American Free Trade between the USA, Canada and Mexico) and opposes the IRS (Internal Revenue Service, i.e. the federal tax authority of the USA). Ron Paul, House Representative of the 14th district of Texas, believes that US foreign policy must be reformed to avoid conflicts around the world."

Press TV: Dr Paul, thank you for joining us. Let us start with foreign policy. How do you think the new administration will handle the war in Iraq?

Ron Paul: The same way the old administration had. I do not think expect a whole lot of changes although he [US President-elect Barack Obama] had promised to bring the troops home in 16 months, now he is not out on this because of the so-called agreement.

But I do not think he was ever serious about changing foreign policy. I think foreign policy in this country always stays the same whether the Republicans or Democrats lead it, because when you look at what George Bush ran on in the year 2000, he was strongly critical of Clinton's foreign policy of too much nation building and too much policing of the world, because the American people liked to hear that. But once they get in they do same thing.

So, I do not expect much change in Iraq. At the same time, he does not even pretend to have a difference of opinion on Afghanistan. So it is not so much the individual countries, what he is going to do, as much as he overall endorses foreign interventionism.

And it is just of a matter of how fast you move and which leaders you have but essentially he picked all the leaders John McCain loves. The neocons love the foreign policy group that he has put together. So it is just a matter of time before the Democrat base that did not want him to continue the Bush-McCain policies ... they are going to get pretty upset I think pretty soon.

What do you think about the situation in Afghanistan?

More of these attacks and this week this serious mistake of the Afghani police being killed, but equally important is the attacks into Pakistan and innocent people are getting killed and everybody is pretending that it is

no big deal. But it is a big deal, so it is just radicalizing the fringes.

See I do not happen to believe that the Pakistani government is stupid enough to say well lets go into India and start a war, but I believe no matter which society or which country it is, there is always one group that can get radicalized, and this is just more motivation. So the more people we end up killing, innocent people and civilians, or the pretence – oh yeah this is just a terrorist we just killed a bunch of terrorists. Well ... How do they know? Did they catch them and try them?

So no, I think the whole process is very bad, and I condemn it out of our own self interest. I think it is bad for America. I think the more of this we do the more costly it is in terms of money and lives. And, the more likely it is that some day we are going to be subject to a terrorist attack here at home.

You know we are over there we are easy targets. But they are capable of coming back here too. I do not believe terrorists do not have motivations and we need to think more about where the motivations come from.

Do you expect to see more of these airstrikes inside sovereign territory, inside Pakistan?

I do not see that ending. I think Obama will do it, because I think foreign policy is controlled over and above the political parties. I do not think our political parties have that much say in the matter. So I expect those attacks are going to continue.

And, unfortunately, I think Obama has been pretty adamant about how to treat Iran. He has said that maybe we will talk to them

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Federal Reserve Board Abolition Act (Introduced in House)

HR 833 IH
111th CONGRESS
1st Session
H. R. 833

To abolish the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks, to repeal the Federal Reserve Act, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 3, 2009

Mr PAUL introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services

A BILL

To abolish the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks, to repeal the Federal Reserve Act, and for other purposes.
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Federal Reserve Board Abolition Act'.

SECTION 2. FEDERAL RESERVE BOARD ABOLISHED.

(a) *In General*- Effective at the end of the 1-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and each Federal reserve bank are hereby abolished.

(b) *Repeal of Federal Reserve Act*- Effective at the end of the 1-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Federal Reserve Act is hereby repealed.

(c) Disposition of Affairs-

(1) *MANAGEMENT DURING DISSOLUTION PERIOD*- During the 1-year period referred to in subsection (a), the Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System

(A) shall, for the sole purpose of winding up the affairs of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks--

(i) manage the employees of the Board and each such bank and provide for the payment of compensation

and benefits of any such employee which accrue before the position of such employee is abolished; and

(ii) manage the assets and liabilities of the Board and each such bank until such assets and liabilities are liquidated or assumed by the Secretary of the Treasury in accordance with this subsection; and

(B) may take such other action as may be necessary, subject to the approval of the Secretary of the Treasury, to wind up the affairs of the Board and the Federal reserve banks.

(2) LIQUIDATION OF ASSETS-

(A) *IN GENERAL*- The Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall liquidate all assets of the Board and the Federal reserve banks in an orderly manner so as to achieve as expeditious a liquidation as may be practical while maximizing the return to the Treasury.

(B) *TRANSFER TO TREASURY*- After satisfying all claims against the Board and any Federal reserve bank which are accepted by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and redeeming the stock of such banks, the net proceeds of the liquidation under subparagraph (A) shall be transferred to the Secretary of

the Treasury and deposited in the General Fund of the Treasury.

(3) *ASSUMPTION OF LIABILITIES*- All outstanding liabilities of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal reserve banks at the time such entities are abolished, including any liability for retirement and other benefits for former officers and employees of the Board or any such bank in accordance with employee retirement and benefit programs of the Board and any such bank, shall become the liability of the Secretary of the Treasury and shall be paid from amounts deposited in the general fund pursuant to paragraph (2) which are hereby appropriated for such purpose until all such liabilities are satisfied.

(d) *Report*- At the end of the 18-month period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget shall submit a joint report to the Congress containing a detailed description of the actions taken to implement this Act and any actions or issues relating to such implementation that remain uncompleted or unresolved as of the date of the report.

The Revolutionary Plan to Make the American Society Work for Wall Street

How did the F.D.R. system come about?

The Federal Reserve Act was not drafted in the halls of Congress, it was drafted in secret on this private island off the coast of Georgia which was completely owned in those days – it was a private club actually called the Jekyll Island club – by a small group of billionaires from New York: people like *JP Morgan*, and *William Rockefeller*, and their business associates. And so the banking fraternity went to Jekyll Island, to this very private club, and for 7 days they sat around a table there in private – smoked a lot of cigars I'm sure and drank some good whiskey – and drafted the Federal Reserve Act. [...]

That is one of the reasons that these people said that they were meeting on Jekyll Island – in secret. One of the objectives they had for the creation of the Federal Reserve System was to create a structure which would have a hand in the public purse, so that when the banks got into trouble they would be able to draw upon tax payers' support to bail them out, and they would do so under the banner of protecting the public. It is a very clever ploy. [...]

Well, the truth of the matter is that the Federal Reserve system is a cartel. That is kind of a shocking statement for most people – a cartel. If somebody had told me that, let us say 10 years ago, I would have thought they were kind of off their rocker. But the fact of the matter is the Federal Reserve System is a cartel, no different than a sugar cartel, or an oil cartel, or a banana cartel – this happens to be a banking cartel. And they have gone into partnership with the Federal government to enforce their cartel agreements. Now, that's the hard reality. [...]

The F.D.R. system works as follows

But once you take that connection [money backed by gold] away and say, "oh, we don't need to back this piece of paper by anything," this oz now does not have anything behind it except a signature from the Secretary of the Treasury, and some

words across the top of it that say Federal Reserve note – whatever that means – now all of a sudden these things can be produced without limit and the quantity increases faster than the expansion of goods and services. And the first thing you know, it does not take one oz to buy a suit, belt and a pair of shoes, it takes two, and then it takes four, and then it takes twenty-four, then it takes one hundred, and so forth, which is why as you mentioned a moment ago, since the creation of the Federal Reserve System the value, the purchasing power, of the dollar has dropped by over 90%. That means that the government and the banks, this partnership – this cartel that we are talking about called the Federal Reserve System – has literally taken your purchasing power. They have taxed you in a way that you did not even know it. Inflation is a hidden tax, it is a tax that is just as real as the income tax or any other tax, in fact it is even more real because you can not escape it – I mean there is no deduction; it falls on people who can least afford to pay it more heavily. It is one of the worst taxes imaginable. Inflation is a tax and it is a direct tax as a result of this cartel called the Federal Reserve System.

All quotations taken from an interview with the author in 2006, to be found at <http://www.financialsense.com/transcriptions/2006/1018griffin.html>

"You have to make it sound as though it's in the interests of the public"

"[...] just assuming for the moment that this is so, and if you're the head of a cartel – a banking cartel in this case – and you had to go before the public or Congress and justify your moves, you have to make it sound as though it's in the interests of the public, otherwise the public would not go along with it. What would happen, for example, if the Federal Reserve Chairman were to make a speech and he said, 'well, we raised the interest rates today because we wanted to improve the profit picture of our member banks.' Now, that wouldn't go over

too well. So they always have to say, 'we raised or lowered interest rates' – or whatever they're going to do, because they're concerned about inflation, or they're concerned about employment or unemployment; they're concerned about world factors. In other words, you see, they're concerned about you folks – and that makes it all very good. And that's the game that goes on, Jim. And so they have to make it sound as though all of these machinations are being done somehow in the interests of the general public. [...]"

Money out of nothing – the government has written laws to make this scam quite legal

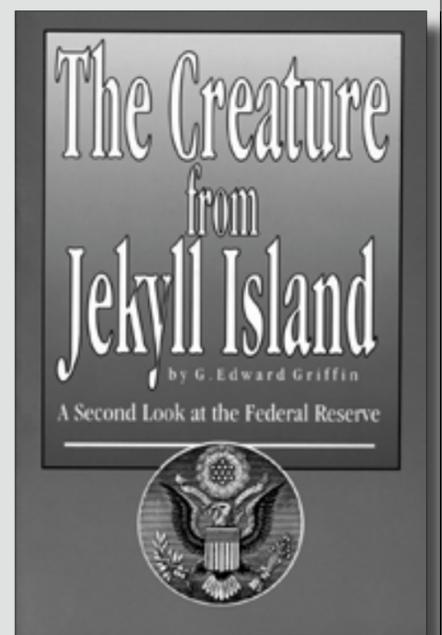
"[...] the banks create money out of nothing, and then they collect interest on it. Now that's the basic scam. When a bank loans you money that money doesn't exist prior to your walking into the bank. He has the authority of law – a moment ago, I said the Federal Reserve System went into partnership with the Federal government, so the government is their partner, and so the government has written laws to make this scam quite legal, that banks can do things now that were you and I to do them we'd go to jail. But the banks can do them because they have their partner in government that says, 'Ok, the banks, and only the banks, can do this.' And one of those things is that the banks can lend money that they don't have, and they can collect interest on it. And that's how money comes into creation in the United States and most of the Western world. [...]"

All for the benefit of the private banking system

"[...] why are the banks in this thing? Well, let's follow that money, that was created out of nothing for the government and see where it goes. It goes into the private banking system. Let's take \$1000, for example, that has been paid to a postal worker who delivers our mail. He's working for the Federal government.

Now, he's got \$1000 in a pay check that came out of that billion dollars that was created out of nothing and presented to the Federal government. So now we're just going to trace a thousand dollars of it that comes to the postal worker. He's got a paycheck now, he doesn't imagine that that money didn't exist a moment ago or yesterday, and he doesn't care, it looks like a good check to him – banks will accept it, everybody will cash it. So he takes it down to his local bank at the end of the street there and deposits it into his private checking account. Now things speed up. The money is out of the Federal Reserve government context and goes into the commercial banking system as a deposit. [...]"

Source: Excerpts from an interview by Jim Puplava with G. Edward Griffin, 2006. Financial Sense Newshour; www.financialsense.com/transcriptions/2006/1018griffin.html



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"US Foreign Politics Continues ..."

continued from page 1

a little bit, but he is not talking about never having a blockade on Iran and if they even look like they are going to have a weapon, we have a moral obligation to stop them.

Well, did we stop Pakistan? Did we stop India? Did we stop Israel from having a weapon? So what's the big deal? But he has been very adamant. He spoke to the foreign policy of the internationalists – the people who direct both the Democratic Party and the Republican Party.

It has been a year since the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) dismissed the claims that Iran is producing a nuclear weapon. Yet we are seeing a lot of war-talk here in Washington. Why do you think that is?

Well, I think there are a lot of reasons. I think oil is an important reason. I think the neocon mentality of we're good people and we going to impose our goodness on people. I think Israel has to do something with it.

And I think some people honestly say, you know they get convinced, they say 'Iranians are bad people they might bomb us.' So for these various reasons they all come together. Same reasons they went together to go after the Iraqis. So it is a lot of misinformation, emotional reactions. But, unfortunately, if you are talking generalities, the American people do not want this.

In a way the candidate who argues more for peace wins. So, Obama was sort of the peace candidate. He wanted less intervention. But it didn't matter anyway.

But when it comes to dealing with policy, I think that our policies are locked in place. The

saving grace may be that our bankruptcy in this country will make it very difficult for us to afford it just like the Soviets had to leave Afghanistan because they ran out of money and there system failed. Our system could fail and it might be a blessing in disguise.

Do you think with the incoming administration we will see a difference in policies toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? Do you think Hamas could be part of the solution? I do not expect any significant changes there. I think he is not going to be more sympathetic toward the Palestinians. He may pay lip service to it, but if it is something that Israel does not endorse, it is not going to happen.

Let's move to the economy. Why have you introduced this bill to end the Federal Reserve?

Because the Federal Reserve is a central bank that under our constitution is illegal, there is no authority for it, and it is of no value to us. It does nothing but harm because it has the power to create money out of thin air. We have legalized counterfeiting.

Why an individual like myself that cherishes personal liberty is so opposed is that it allows governments to grow because they do not have to be responsible. If you were in a free society with sound money, you would have to appropriate money, tax the people, spend the money and know exactly what was going on. But, if a secret bank can just create money out of thin air then they [the government] can circumvent the people and circumvent the Congress, and they can go fight wars and not be responsible.

See, if we tax the American people for all that we do overseas, it would end in weeks,

because we do not have the money, but if you inflate the currency you can delay the payment ... you worry about high prices down the road. And we have been sort of lucky to have the reserve currency of the world and we haven't suffered from the inflation.

So it just enhances big government and besides its illegal and morally its wrong. It is wrong to allow an individual to counterfeit money. Why do we allow a secret bank to counterfeit money. There are many reasons why we should not have a central bank and why it is so damaging.

Early parts of a cycle where the government inflates a currency, there are some benefits because it look likes you're real wealthy but its only temporary. Now, what we are seeing the market catching up and saying that this was not such a good idea. It was a bubble.

And the bubbles that the Federal Reserve created are now coming apart and the ultimate bubble to come unglued or come apart will be dollar bubble. And we are now billing everybody to the point of trillions of dollars which means that the dollar won't be able to withstand this and eventually the world will reject the dollar – which for us here means higher interest rates and higher prices and a country that's going to be a lot poorer.

Why are you always referred to as the true constitutionalist?

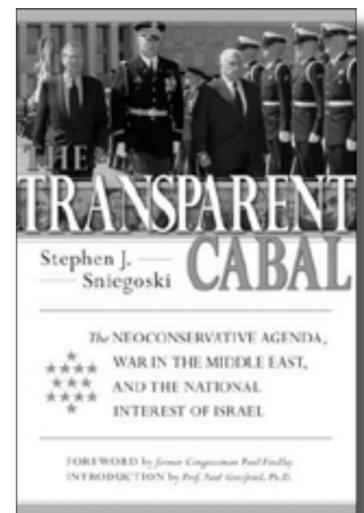
Because I do, I follow the constitution. And it is an old-fashioned idea that you believe in it literally. Our Article I, Section A lists what we can do, and it also says by our ninth and tenth amendment that if it is not authorized, you are not allowed to do it. So all governments should be local, and yet we have drift-

ed away from that for the last 100 years and I just thought that it was a pretty good idea.

The founders had a pretty good idea about the constitution, to make the government very local and divide it and only have a few things bring us together as a country such as sound money and free trade.

So, I think it was a great idea. It's the oath that we all take and everybody else ignores it. I did not think that very many people in this country cared. But to my surprise in the presidential campaign we discovered a lot. They said hey that sounds like a good idea I am so glad; I have been waiting for somebody to say something like that. So it is been very encouraging.

Source: Press TV, 27 December 2008 ; www.presstv.com/detail.aspx?id=79644§ionid=3510302



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Venezuela Is About to Free Itself From Neo-Liberalism

President Hugo Chávez has achieved a lot in the course of the past years

An interview with Walter Suter, former Swiss Ambassador in Venezuela¹

After Latin America has served as the US American neo-liberalism's research laboratory for several decades, a reinforced emancipation movement has emerged in the course of the last few years, which is particularly supported by the peoples and their elected political representatives. There is a clear striving for independence from the USA and a self-confident autonomy with respect to economic questions. The elections of Evo Morales in Bolivia, of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Fernando Lugo in Paraguay or Lula da Silva in Brazil as presidents were crucial steps in this development, which also led to more co-operation and responsibility in the population. The western media usually do not report appropriately on the developments in Latin American states. Current Concerns had the opportunity to talk to the former Swiss Ambassador in Venezuela and expert on Latin America, Mr Walter Suter. In the following interview, he shares information on the developments and changes in Venezuela.

Current Concerns: Before Hugo Chávez' election there were times of relative instability. There were changes of government, putsch attempts and military putsches. Now the situation is rather stable. How did Venezuela succeed in achieving this stability?

Walter Suter: After Chávez' election in 1998 resistance grew very fast, and for four years Chávez and his administration had to fight off many attempts to kick him out of his office. This culminated in several putsch attempts. The most prominent was the one in April 2002, on the occasion of which Chávez was fetched back to office by the basis, by the population, particularly in Caracas. The inhabitants of the poorer areas descended from their *Barrios* down to the palace and demanded his release. When he initiated reconciliation with his opponents after his return, his actions were interpreted as signs of weakness. Half a year later, the *knockout* – a kind of sabotage strike – was launched in co-operation or rather complicity with the official trade unions. They boasted that Chávez would be gone within six days. Two months later, it was they who had gone and Chávez is still holding his office. Then peace returned. However, nearly four years had passed and in these four years, the government had actually not been able to work at all; it took some time until they could implement their programs and start their actual work.

* Walter Suter, who has worked in the Swiss diplomatic service for decades and has had connections with South America for over 30 years, served in the Bolivian Republic of Venezuela from 2003 to 2007 as a Special Ambassador to the Swiss Embassy in Caracas. At the same time he was Head of the Consular and Finance Inspectorate of the EDA (Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs).

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Then they began with their *misiones sociales*: programs for health care, which they started with Cuban physicians, followed by programs for education, for housing etc. Since then, the programs have been extended, deepened and introduced on a larger scale. The most salient are the basis health care in the *barrios* and the access to the educational system. Included was a literacy campaign on the one side, but also the possibility to complete their formal education for those people, in the countryside and in the poorer quarters with no access to the educational system. That was a very good thing. In fact, this led to some stability at the basis. For the first time, the government could actually do something on a social level for those who were disadvantaged and excluded until then. These are only just the beginnings, but we are on good way.

Due to the Chávez' power of resistance, there was a consolidation on the political level. This is because Chávez enjoys much credibility with a majority of the population at the basis – as was evident in the election results, starting with the presidential election, followed by the elections for the constituent assembly, the referendum on the constitution and the referendum on his presidency. That is his fund. A majority of the population regards him as authentic and has faith in him. They are convinced of his way of acting: Within ten years, he showed them that his commitment to improve the fate of the disadvantaged and to introduce more social justice in society was honest and genuine. A majority of the population, which was affected by these disadvantages, believes in him. That certainly constitutes his strength.

How would you answer the reproach, which is being constantly raised that Venezuela was a dictatorship?

Its legitimacy and that of its government were confirmed by correctly accomplished elections, which were well monitored, by the way. There are no more questions, the results are regular and legal. Thus, stability has returned, of course, because none of the former heads of state has enjoyed such credibility before. They were often in office only for a very short time. Chávez was confirmed by the results of the last regional and municipal elections. Even if the government supporters have lost governors' seats, the relationship is still 17 to 6, i.e. 70% of the governors' seats are occupied by government supporters. Of course, these lost seats are partially problematic seats, like the ones of Greater Caracas or Miranda. With the municipal elections, however, the government supporters increased the portion of the municipalities, which are represented by them, from 60 to 80%. That is an enormous increase.

In the context of the 1999 constitution, a referendum was launched last year – which was constitutional – and then the result – which was unfavorable for the President – was accepted, too. The election results were also accepted by notable opponents, who had been involved in the putsch and, instead of being imprisoned, had been certified as candidates, who were later elected and accepted. At the beginning of 2008, Chávez had issued an amnesty for all those, who had been involved in the putsch; only those persons were excluded, who were accused of direct participation in shootings and acts of violence, etc. This is really very generous. It is at least psychologically important that the one or the other prominent exponent of the opposition also won a governor's election. Thus, the reproach of election manipulation is obsolete, or else those who raise this reproach must also have the same question put to them.

What may lead to renewed unrest now is the new referendum of 15 February about a further constitutional amendment, intended to abolish the two-period restriction to the



term of office of the respective head of state as well as the term of office of the remaining elected administration and to make their unrestricted re-election possible.

In our media you can frequently hear that Chávez would like to be confirmed as a head of state for a lifetime.

Perhaps this is his desire. But he would have to be re-elected, you may not forget that. And the opponents have an open field here. They can continue to be politically active, and if they put up a strong rival candidate until 2012, it is not sure that Mr Chávez will be re-elected. Another candidate could also win; this is not questioned. You have to be careful here, this is very important. Of course, the first one to be solidly re-elected is Chávez himself. We do not have to beat around the bush here. There are clear intentions and the majority of his party, the *PSUV – Partido Socialista Unificado de Venezuela*, supports him and has been successful so far. It is not even a year old (so far it has been a movement, the *Movement 5th Republic [MVR]*). Measured against the short time since the local elections they have been very successful. Before the elections, the Chavistas' fear was great that there could be larger losses. They were positively surprised by the result, although there had been insiders like the election campaign leader, who said in July that they were going to win 60 to 70%. That means they know the basis. The opposition does not know the basis; they know their microcosms – including Greater Caracas and Valencia or other large cities. They also find support with the industry and trade where the majority of their votes is coming from, this is where they are powerful. But in the countryside they do not find any large approval, and the majority of the population backs the present government.

Stability came thus by the social measures and the resistance power of this president. Any other candidate would have been finished after the putsch attempt. Chávez, too would have been gone if there had not been this reaction of the basis. It happened for the first time in Latin America. This means that things have definitely changed.

How do you explain the fact that this change was possible?

Chávez was elected by a majority that believed in him and in his project to bring about real change. Change meant to include the excluded, which means social justice. He always announced his program this way. He had already begun in the 1980s, with that movement among young military officers. That was a socialist program. People believed in him – and in his measures that he tried to push through and which corresponded with these goals. Despite some resistance, the majority were convinced of the fact that he really

wanted the change. Later, it was this majority that voted for him. Moreover, he made it clear that he was going to put up some resistance, and they wanted to keep their President. They still had confidence in him, because he was radiating credibility and authenticity. They did not feel deceived.

Let us have a closer look at the social reforms. What kind of reforms were they?

I cannot explain all this in detail. The most important reform was the basic health care, the *Barrio Adentro* ['into the ghetto']. This is the *atención médica primaria*. This program was complemented by small hospitals for minor operations, the so-called outpatient clinics for the treatment of the people. Moreover, there were special centers for diagnosis etc. and the former and still existing state hospitals that had been working before but had been rather neglected. They were included in the program, renovated and extended, so that a whole network was established. It covers about 90% of the cases. The complicated cases have to be hospitalized. So this is how the system works. It is not perfect yet, but it works as far as the *atención médica primaria* is concerned which is present all over the country. Hundreds of thousands if not millions of people have thus seen a doctor for the first time.

Is the medical care free of charge?

Yes, it is completely free. All the social programs, even the schools, are financed by the profits of oil sales. This is something very special, as part of the revenues is not included in the state budget, but the state oil company pays it directly into a special fund. This social fund, in combination with an infrastructure fund, is always built up to two or three billion as long as money is being poured in. The social fund of the oil company directly finances all the programs. This is also true for the infrastructure; there are plans for a national railway system and a long-distance traffic system. It is intended for a 25 to 30 years' period and includes 13,000 km of railway tracks across the whole country. There are plans to connect the north to the south, an improvement of railway infrastructure, of public transport near large urban areas, an extension of freight transportation and an improvement of public transport in big cities. So far, public transportation has been underdeveloped. Traditionally, this has something to do with oil culture: everyone wanted to drive a car. However, there are enormous infrastructure projects. Streets are built, airports as well; one was built in Caracas, and all this is financed by the infrastructure fund of the oil company. In our eyes, this is a very unusual way, but it is legally backed, in order to shorten the decision-making process. The financing of the social infrastructure programs was approved by the parliament.

Don't you see a danger in crude oil? There is a theory that sinking oil prices can be a political weapon. Is the funding based merely on the oil profits or do they also extend to or develop industrial production and farming, which could also export their goods?

Diversification of production is still at the very beginning, it is a difficult task. They started triggering off agricultural production, as more than 80% of the foodstuff has to be imported into a country that could produce everything it needs, itself. This was the case before, but the situation has not much improved yet. The attempts to foster diversification through the formation of cooperatives are advancing very slowly. The big landowners, who produced before, continue to produce now, but that does not really increase the yields. In order to advance the formation of cooperatives, educational programs were started in a special mission – including literacy campaigns, primary schools, secondary school exams, university studies or training technical professions. This program is called *vuelvan caras*. It trains, for example, young people to become farm-

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ers. Thus, younger people should be brought back to the country from the city where they had moved to with their parents searching for jobs. This is the idea behind the program, and when they have returned to the countryside, they should establish cooperatives together with other trained farmers. They receive support in this process and can thus contribute to food production. This is the most decisive point: the diversification of economic production so that they do not rely exclusively on natural resources.

Is that also part of the political program?

Of course, in addition, they want to set up local productions, which is technologically demanding. And in this context they are also very interested in having agreements with various states, e.g. recently they have made an agreement with Switzerland as they want to acquire know-how – maybe trading it for petrol, I do not know – nevertheless it is an agreement about economic, technological and scientific co-operation, effectively aiming at promoting and diversifying the own productive forces outside of the petrol sector. So there are efforts underway, which have been partly successful, but we can imagine that everything could move forward a little faster and on a wider scale.

What is the reason that progress is only slow?

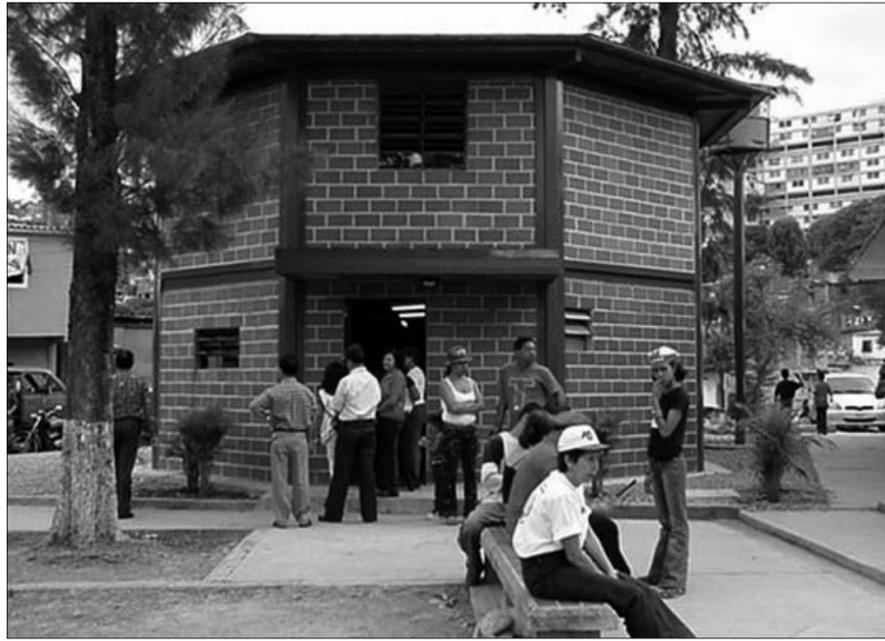
Some of the problems are of organizational or bureaucratic kind. In the interior they still have objections within the public administration. People who do not fully agree with Chávez have not been simply dismissed. So there is a lot of passive resistance by Chávez' opponents at the middle and lower administration level. Also the corruption frequently denounced by Chávez is an evil which still proves to be an obstacle, which is difficult to overcome. It takes time and therefore it does not move forward as fast as would be desirable. One reason might be that certain foreign states are not very enthusiastic about the agreements that have been concluded with respect to their own companies. Neither does the kind of international media coverage further the readiness to invest. However there are several agreements with Spain, Portugal, China and Iran, with the exception of Russia. However, concerning high technology there are only very few agreements. Important are not only those with Spain and Portugal, but also those with Austria, France and Italy. These refer especially to the railway area as one sector of the infrastructure. The same might apply to Switzerland. These attempts are taking place and the government is interested in realizing them as clearly expressed. Therefore, the government wants to diversify the professional training so that more autonomy, more sovereignty could be created by this sector of production. The program exists, but the realization is getting on only slowly. On the other hand the social program is making good progress.

What does the distribution of land look like today?

There is still a lot of state owned land in the countryside – dating from former times. I think the percentage is about 30-40 % of state land, which is not cultivated, which was the case as well in former times. The *polígonos agroindustriales* were neglected. Those, who were responsible at the top, could make money easier dealing mineral oil. Actually, there is still a lot of state owned land. But apart from that, most of the land is not in hands of small farmers, but in hands of big landowners. On the grounds of the land reform, they started to partly expropriate certain parts of fallow land, the owners receiving compensation, of course, in order to put them at the disposal of such collectives, such cooperatives. There would be enough land in order to advance agricultural production. This would certainly be possible. It is not true that the entire arable land is in the hands of the big landowners. There is actually a lot of land owned by the state. The existing land could be worked very well.

What is preventing a faster development here?

There is the danger of a certain over-bureaucratization against which Chávez is warning



A typical Barrio Adentro (basic health care centre) in Venezuela. (picture zvg)

ever and again. It is very difficult to cope with all this now. They are trying to by the empowerment of the basis, of the affected people in the countryside; the collectives in the communities should take this matter into their own hands. That was the way, the *consejos comunales*, the so-called municipal councils, were established on the grounds of the constitution. That is not anything grafted. The involved parties have the possibility to work out their own projects, but doing so in an open process, getting together. These projects which have to do with the infrastructure are to be of productive nature, of course, and there are still only few which are submitted to the central government for expertise and approbation. As I learned, about 80% of the so far presented projects are said to have been accepted. The approval together with the necessary money goes back to the communities. They administrate the money by an internal council which has been elected from their own ranks – not by one person alone. This way a social control over the usage of the money is guaranteed. In former times, when the mayor had the spending power alone, there were continual problems in the production. The elected mayors still exist, but they are now subjected to this social control. They cannot dispose of the money, of the expenses directly. The procedure involves the *consejos comunales*, and of course the participation of the basis is of great importance. This kind of social control should actually bring about a reduction of the corrupt practices in the long run, and perhaps also some of the internal resistance of certain bureaucrats. This way the over-bureaucratization might be partly stopped, because very many small unities are involved: The municipal councils - there are several of them within a community, in a *municipio*. These may be some smaller neighbourhoods, quarters, etc. It is very decentralised. Using this decentralised structure, they are now trying to regain some social control over corruption and bureaucracy and at the same time to involve all relevant

people into the process of consultation and decision. Participation means to take them seriously. Before, they only were subordinates without an own voice, and now they got this voice and this reinforces the self-esteem of the people, of course. I could experience this myself on site, and I also know it from very trustworthy people who say it is starting to gain a foothold in the countryside. I saw what everybody can see: meanwhile there is a lot of such so-called communal television, many of those sessions, such community gatherings are broadcast directly in the evenings. They actually try to be very transparent.

One can recognize certain parallels to the municipal autonomy in Switzerland.

Yes, if this should be of interest to anybody, it is to us, as we know what it means – und vice versa, the interest in a small state has its roots there. These are – of course – interesting approaches of direct democracy and participation, which go even further on the paper, including the possibility to vote out officials by referendum, etc. The participation is very important, and therefore, I believe, there is a good chance that the generalised corruption can be broken or at least curtailed. It now started that individual officials are no longer the local sovereigns or princes. All this is under way.

It does not only happen in the countryside, it is also possible in the cities, and meanwhile, some of the oppositional mayors have realized that it is not so bad after all. Participation is a good thing, you certainly can gain a strong basis among your constituents. Actually, this is an approach which – in the long run – meets the interests of everybody. As long as money is coming in, this could contribute to a sound long term stability, because the whole structure is anchored in the basis more or less and everybody is or can be incorporated somewhere by direct participation, if he wishes so. Chávez and others underline the importance of the fact that the *corresponsabilidad*, the joint responsibility, which was introduced by the constitution, does not only mean to have



Meeting of consejos comunales in the countryside. (picture zvg)

rights, but also responsibilities. We all want to bear and share responsibilities while building our society. And our goal has been and still is social justice. Nobody must be excluded. We are not talking about egalitarianism, but about social justice. These measures, which were introduced, especially these *consejos comunales*, are starting to gain a foothold.

What does this development mean for the country?

It means above all a stabilising process. We are still at the beginning. This is a very new phase we have talked about. 500 years of authoritarianism is a long time. What is happening now is a change of paradigm, a cultural change – which is of course not completed from today to tomorrow. But the people are wiser than one thinks, one should not underestimate them. Because they feel that they are now respected in their dignity, in their being as subjects of the state, not as objects. This, of course, changes the mind-setting, the consciousness, to stay no longer in a state of vegetating semi-awareness. This alone is a tremendous change, which will contribute to a cohesion of society and to stabilization in the long run. In this beginning phase, of the project there are two points which may be of importance for further stabilization: One is that the president can possibly add one more period. The main point for which they are trying to get a consent by this referendum is that the constitution only allows two periods of office for every president. I would like to put the emphasis on this. But in the present case Chávez is concerned. And it is obvious that he has the majority behind him who wants him to stay in office, because he is a guarantor in this still lasting beginning phase. In Latin America we still are learning with respect to such changes, there is little training and experience in participation and responsibility and decentralisation of responsibility. Before there were certain people who commanded and others obeyed. And as to this important point he is the guarantor, he gives the impulses.

In many EU states long governmental periods are not rare. Nobody has ever called this dictatorial.

We have to draw the public's attention to this. There are 17 or 18 of 27 EU states in which the possibility to be re-elected, at best, is of no question. At best, not for sure – also he cannot be sure, as there is no guarantee for anybody. Even if it is principally possible, he has no guarantee that he will be re-elected. We now know that the election system is absolutely confirmed, not only internally, but also externally by the EU mission. One of the reasons for a re-election is that he may carry on as long as possible, because in the eyes of the majority he certainly is the guarantor for the new development. He is very much connected with this culture, he is a real leader, a natural leader, we may not like this here. But we have to try now to look at the matter with Latin American eyes. Not with European ethnocentric eyes. They did not have (at all) any Civil Revolution. This here is an attempt, respectively a leap, from Feudalism directly into Modernity. This means of course "on va brûler les étapes" (we will skip the stages). This is always a bit delicate, of course. In this phase such impulse transmitters play a mighty role – I now say leaders who are giving the impulses, and in the eyes of the concerned and interested people they are a kind of guarantee.

Which is the second point you wanted to mention?

The second point relates of course to the mineral oil. My only comment is that the government has been budgeting in a provident and prudent way, up to now. Up to one year ago, the state budget was based on a price for mineral oil of 35 dollars per barrel. They have had quite good an income lately. The social funds could be enlarged and also the foreign currency reserves of the State Central Bank and so on. A year ago, they adapted the price. After the price had been very high for a long time, i.e. at a base of 60 – not 100 – we are now at 40 dollars. When I saw the planning minister two or three weeks ago, whom I know personally very well, I asked him with respect to this aspect und he said: "We have

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“What Can We All Do to Stop This Imminent Slaughter of People?”

Report From Peoples' Union Of Civil Liberties
(Pucl-Tamilnadu And Pondichery)

In the Indian Parliament Pranab Mukherji talked about the number of civilians affected by the war in the northern areas as numbering 70,000. This is in sharp contrast to ICRC and UN figures which clearly estimated that about 240,000–280,000 civilians are caught in the war torn areas. We were wondering as to whether there was a reason for the sudden reduction in numbers.

The following note makes it very clear why there is this sudden reduction. Please note that the attempt now is by the Sri Lankan Government to go in for carpet bombing has as they pressured to show results in the

war that is not showing signs of ending. It is estimated that in such an event anywhere from 1,00,000–1,50,000 civilians will die. The government will try to explain the large number of deaths as not being civilians but “combatants”. This is sinister.

The time frame for this type of an attack is said to be the next 3 weeks. What can we all do to stop this imminent slaughter of people who already are starving for the last 2 months? Women, children and old people are particularly suffering ... the challenge is to stop this madness!

Nazi-Type Holocaust Imminent in Sri Lanka – Mass Mobilization for Massacre by Sri Lankan Armed Forces (SLAF)

New York based *Human Rights Watch* (HRW) has said in a report released recently that “Sri Lankan forces are shelling hospitals and so-called safe zones and slaughtering the civilians there.” James Ross, legal and policy director at Human Rights Watch added: “Sri Lankan forces have repeatedly and indiscriminately shelled areas crowded with displaced persons. This includes numerous reported bombardments of government-declared ‘safe zones’ and of the remaining hospitals in the region.”

The HRW report says Sri Lankan government forces have repeatedly and indiscriminately shelled areas crowded with Tamil civilians and casualties have skyrocketed in the past two months. Noting that civilian casualties “have risen dramatically” since the *The Liberation Tamil Tigers Eelan* (LTTE) retreated to a roughly 100-square-kilometer area in northeastern Mullaitivu district, HRW said Sri Lankan military attacks on civilians include “numerous reported bombardments of government-declared ‘safe zones’ and the remaining hospitals in region.”

HRW places total civilian casualties at 7,000, with 2,000 deaths, in two, three weeks adding “information from other sources supports these findings.” “Added to this are the dire hardships faced by the displaced-insufficient food, medical care, and shelter, whether in the combat zone or government-run ‘welfare villages’,” HRW said.

“The Sri Lankan government has indicated that the ethnic Tamil population trapped in the war zone can be presumed to be siding with the LTTE and treated as combatants, effectively sanctioning unlawful attacks,” HRW said.

This is a devious and frightening proposition. There are reliable reports that *Sri Lankan Armed Forces* (SLAF) is planning a holocaust of Sri Lankan Tamils. The devious ploy appears to be to down-play the number of civil-

ians “trapped in the war zone”. Despite several estimates put out by International Agencies and Humanitarian groups that IDPs trapped in the “war zone” number over 250,000, Sri Lankan Government is deliberately underplaying it by putting the numbers at 70,000. India’s External Affairs Minister has endorsed this figure without verifying Facts.

The Sri Lankan ploy appears to be as below. Sri Lankan Government has stated that about 35,000 Internal Displaced People (IDP) have already escaped the war zone. In the next few days they will claim that all the 70,000 has got away from the war zone leaving only the LTTE there. Sri Lankan Government would then “sanction the unlawful attacks” as predicted by HRW. Actually there would be over 200,000 Tamils in the 100-square-kilometer strip.

This attack will be carried out by the massive force of over 60,000 Sri Lankan troops supported by Artillery, Tanks and Air Force. Result would be a human carnage of unimaginable proportions that could number over 100,000! This is not based on imaginary fear, but conveyed by independent and reliable sources who have first-hand knowledge of the situation obtaining in North Sri Lanka. And this holocaust is imminent.

If this happens it will be the most horrendous human tragedy ever witnessed. The question is whether Government of India is a willing party to this horror of horrors or will they use all means to prevent this holocaust? Indians in general and Tamils in particular need an immediate answer before it is too late.

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been carefully diversifying, and we have already decided to adapt the budget for the next year, i.e. to reduce it a bit. We also will reduce this reference price in our budget. That means, we will practice a certain reduction in the program, but there is no plan to cancel some of these social programs, but they should be continued with a bit less intensity. A bit less rapidly.”

They will adapt the budget as they are concerned to deal providently and carefully with the financial resources. There are very good consultants in this domain, in the Ministry of Finance, there is an economic affairs council – these are very good people, specialists, who are also supporting the Bolivarian Process, who understand a lot about the matter. Two, three years ago, they started to draw back their assets from the USA, to get out of the dollar, and went with the biggest part to Europe. They are continuing to do so, of course hoping that the prices will not fall into a bottomless abyss. According to the development the contributions to the social fund will be augmented. Within the bounds of possibility they try to deal with the fin-

ancial resources selectively and providently. This is the background. Income from mineral oil, the budget and if possible of course the re-election. The chance to be re-elected is still no guarantee. There is still no article in the constitution saying “Mr Chávez is to be elected for life time.” I see that there is a fundamental change in Latin America, it is a peaceful revolution in relation to the rule of law. There is no dictatorship, elections are held, and this causes costs because the adversaries can also participate if they do not draw back, as in the 2006 elections: This has led to a parliament which is now constituted by 100% of members who are loyal to the government. This situation will remain for the next two years. Only then are the next elections and only then they can run again. This and the last local elections have been strikingly consolidated the power of the Chávez government. The time of the violent hostilities seems to be over. There is a democratic development, and it will be difficult to disturb.

Additionally, Chávez has a continental impact. The new governments are partly a consequence of what has happened in Venezuela. The development in Venezuela has shown to the discriminated peoples in the other Latin

International Committee of the Red Cross in Sri Lanka

Organizing Medical Evacuations by Sea

People fleeing hostilities in the Vanni continue to arrive in Putumattalan, on Sri Lanka’s north-eastern coast. Since 10 February, the ICRC has evacuated nearly 2,000 patients and relatives by sea for medical treatment. The evacuations continue, with the support of both parties to the conflict.

Morven Murchison coordinates the ICRC’s health activities in Sri Lanka. She took part in several recent evacuations. In this interview she speaks about the needs of the displaced population in the Vanni.

What is the humanitarian situation in the Vanni, and in Putumattalan in particular?

Thousands of displaced civilians are currently seeking safety, food, water and medical care. Entire families have moved and are still moving towards the coast to escape the fighting. They hope to find something to eat – fish, for example. However, because there is not enough drinking water in the Putumattalan area, they end up moving back inland in search of water. The lack of clean water is a major humanitarian concern: the population on the coast has increased tremendously over recent weeks and the wells in Putumattalan cannot provide enough water for everyone to drink, wash and cook.

As the fighting continues, the area in which most displaced people are located gets smaller by the day. The area in and around Putumattalan is not safe at the moment. Naturally, people look for safe areas and find themselves forced to compete for space with tractors, bullock carts and domestic animals. They dig trenches to protect themselves and remain in them most of the time. They come out only when it is safe for them to do so.

In such difficult conditions, there is also a great sense of community. Food is scarce, but many share whatever they have. The last time I was in Putumattalan someone brought a small basket of fish from the sea, which was immediately shared among the 70 or so people who were there.

Are there medical facilities that can treat the sick and wounded in the Vanni?

As far as we can tell, none of the conventional medical facilities that used to treat the sick and wounded are functioning anymore. There are only a few makeshift medical points left. Owing to security constraints, pregnant women are opting to have their babies wherever they happen to be. The sick and wounded arrive in Putumattalan on a daily basis. To cope with the influx, local people have helped set up a makeshift medical facility in a community centre and school. Even there, some patients are sheltered only by tarpaulins.

The shortage of some medical supplies remains an issue. Many patients transferred from Putumattalan to Trincomalee Hospital have wound infections due to inadequate sanitation and a lack of antibiotics. A few Ministry of Health staff are on the ground doing what they can. They are master improvisers, using bed sheets for bandages and hanging saline drips from tree branches above patients. In the shade of another tree, dead bodies are stored until they are claimed by loved ones. Any unclaimed bodies are buried on the spot.

Are there concerns that there could be an outbreak of disease in Putumattalan?

The risk of an outbreak is very high given most people’s living conditions, the lack of water and the lack of proper sanitation.

There are no proper latrines or pits in the area where most displaced people are. There

are reports of an increase in the number of cases of communicable diseases, including diarrhoea and respiratory infections. We are very concerned about the possibility of a serious outbreak of disease.

The evacuations by sea of sick and wounded people and their families carried out by the ICRC since 10 February have taken place under difficult conditions. They have been possible only because of the ICRC’s neutral and independent status and the active support of both parties to the conflict.

Linh Schroeder coordinates all field operations for the ICRC in Sri Lanka and has played a key role in organizing the evacuations. She explains what the ICRC is able to achieve because of its neutral and independent status.

How does an ICRC sea evacuation get organized?

The ICRC carries out its work in the Vanni, now as ever, as a neutral and independent intermediary with the full support of the parties to the conflict. We have a long history of facilitating the safe movement of civilians and humanitarian aid by road between government-controlled and LTTE-held areas. We have been able to perform this task only through the active support of the parties.

The military and humanitarian situations in the Vanni have obviously changed in recent weeks, but our working procedures remain the same. To evacuate the sick and wounded by ferry, we must first obtain the agreement of the parties. Bringing a boat into a conflict area is a delicate undertaking which we will become involved in only if both sides provide us with the necessary security assurances. They do so because of the neutral and independent nature of our humanitarian work. Only when the safety of our staff and of the vessel and passengers have been guaranteed can a sea evacuation take place. In practical terms, this means that there must be respect for the ICRC’s independence and its humanitarian role as well as agreement on such matters as the timing and route of the operation.

With whom does the ICRC negotiate?

In addition to obtaining guarantees of safe passage from both parties, the ICRC maintains contact with all military and civilian authorities, including those of the LTTE, that may be involved in or affected by the evacuations. We are therefore in constant discussion with the Sri Lanka Security Forces, which control the area in which our ferry navigates, the Sri Lanka Navy in Trincomalee, which disembarks the patients, and Ministry of Health staff, who take care of incoming patients at Trincomalee Hospital.

Practical issues have also had to be taken into account. First of all, we had to find a vessel that was suitable for transporting patients, some of whom are in critical condition. In particular, we needed a large vessel that we could bring patients to on small fishing boats. The Green Ocean, a ferry that usually operates between Trincomalee and Jaffna, is the best option available at the moment. ICRC medical evacuations are scheduled carefully and in discussion with the civilian authorities, in order to minimize the impact of the disruption in the ferry service for the Jaffna population.

Source: International Committee of the Red Cross, 26 February 2009. www.icrc.org

American states that they are not at the mercy of the dominating powers from the interior and from abroad, but that they can really offer resistance. One can vote left for example, and doing so, the influence on what will happen is great, even for active solidarity politics. There are different organizations like *Unasur* (*Unión de Naciones Suramericanas*) and others which have already taken effect in Bolivia. In May 2008 *Unasur* was founded and in August the first urgent meeting took place

on the occasion of which everybody – including the Columbians – said they were not supporting the secession movement in Bolivia. The Americans will not be given admission. A certain strength and solidarity develops on the continent, which grows and which was initiated above all for Venezuela. Thus, the whole process has effects beyond the countries’ borders.

Mr Suter, thank you for the interview.

Lamentablemente ningún cambio de curso de la política de EE.UU. en la OTAN

La Conferencia de seguridad en Munich y el sufrimiento de los afganos

por Karl Müller

Si el nuevo vicepresidente de EE.UU., *Joseph R. Biden*, se hubiera presentado ante la *Conferencia de seguridad* en Munich,* el 7 de febrero, y hubiera aprovechado su primera aparición en público – seguida con gran expectativa – para decir a los ojos y a los oídos de todo el mundo: Nosotros, el nuevo gobierno de los Estados Unidos de América, estamos conmocionados frente a los crímenes y las innumerables víctimas de la política de nuestro país; de ninguna manera vamos a continuar con esa política. Pero vamos a hacer todo – en la medida que sea realizable – para reparar la grave injusticia que nuestro país ha cometido con los pueblos del mundo, y hacer responsables a todos los que son culpables de esos crímenes, independientemente de su posición y nombre.

Y si ésto hubiera sido dicho con sinceridad y de buena fe, entonces, desde Munich, se habría enviado al mundo una señal de cambio; una cesura que la humanidad necesita con urgencia, para que nuestro mundo pueda volver a respirar libremente.

Pero el nuevo vicepresidente no lo hizo, sino que, esencialmente, recurrió a las mismas mentiras del gobierno anterior para justificar la política de potencia mundial. Sólo anunció una nueva táctica: «hablamos en un nuevo tono»; «vamos a escuchar también a los otros»; «vamos a hablar con todos»; «no vamos a pisotear abiertamente el derecho internacional, sino lograr interpretaciones más convenientes del derecho internacional»; «necesitamos a los demás para nuestros objetivos»; «lo llamamos <global governance>».

Para completar, vino acompañado de *Joseph S. Nye*, el ideólogo del pérfido «Soft power». Por lo demás, Biden no cuestionó el hecho de que el siniestro sistema estadounidense de poder y explotación, se arroge el derecho a mantener una conducción desmedida e injustificada. Así, la señal que envió Munich fue muy distinta:

Todavía no estamos dispuestos a admitir injusticias cometidas y a remediarlas. Al contrario: los americanos seguimos pensando con una petulancia maníaca, que hasta ahora

hemos sido «exitosos» con nuestra política de dominación mundial. Pero, ya no lo podemos lograr solos. Y tampoco vemos porqué tenemos que correr solos con los gastos de nuestra política. Los otros, nuestros «aliados», deben aportar aún mucho más a nuestra caja común, y poner muchos más ladrones a disposición para nuestro saqueo en el mundo. ¡Pero el capo de los ladrones seguimos siendo nosotros!

La canciller alemana *Angela Merkel*, cuyo rol desde su entrada en funciones ha sido el de correa de transmisión de las pretensiones de poder de EE.UU. en Europa, se refirió a los últimos años como «décadas en las que pudimos demostrar que avanzamos»; que «ningún país puede por sí solo resolver los conflictos internacionales»: que «nos necesitamos mutuamente»; que el «eje transatlántico» (sic) es la base de nuestra seguridad; y que «el concepto de seguridad integrada es la respuesta adecuada a los desafíos del siglo XXI».

Entonces, para la política de potencia mundial, no bastará la movilización militar sino que se necesitan «medidas conjuntas a nivel político, de desarrollo, policiales, en parte político-culturales y, si es necesario, naturalmente (sic) militares».**

Además, Merkel mencionó el país donde más se persigue actualmente el objetivo de «seguridad integrada»: Afganistán. Merkel: «Yo pienso, que en la misión en Afganistán estamos muy cerca de lograr ese objetivo y esa forma de proceder.»

La sumisión de los afganos debe ser entonces total. La mortandad diaria deberá expandirse, por medio de miles de soldados adicionales de los «aliados». Y a la opinión pública en los respectivos países, se le miente constantemente. El 10 de febrero, incluso *Deutschlandfunk* informó que, recientemente, soldados de las fuerzas de ocupación, aterrorizaban con helicópteros a un pueblo en el norte de Afganistán, en la zona de comando del ejército alemán; y que éste, a su vez, incurre en contradicciones inacabables.

Una encuesta del *Afghan Institute for Social and Public Opinion*, realizada por encargo del *ARD*, *ABC* y la *BBC*, muestra claramente lo que piensan los afganos de las fuerzas de ocupación: «Siete años después de la caída de Taliban, la mayoría de los afganos ha perdido, por el momento, la esperanza de un futuro en paz. Bajo la experiencia diaria de la guerra, violencia, corrupción y pobreza, la gran confianza inicial en EE.UU. y la OTAN se ha convertido en resignación, rechazo y un odio creciente. [...] Después de siete años de guerra los afganos tienen una imagen muy negativa de las tropas de EE.UU. y la OTAN. [...] De todos modos, las tropas extranjeras son percibidas cada vez menos como aliadas en la lucha contra un enemigo común, y cada vez más como parte de la miseria.

De ahí que, por primera vez, una escasa mayoría de los afganos urge por un retiro de las tropas de EE.UU. y la OTAN – en las zonas de lucha un 71%. [...] En las provincias donde se lucha, como Kandahar y Helmand, no se encuentra casi nadie que esté a favor de un aumento de tropas. Un clima explosivo, ya que duplicar las tropas con 30000 soldados más, es el único elemento concreto de la nueva estrategia del Presidente norteamericano *Obama*.» («El odio a occidente crece», *www.tagesschau.de* del 10.2.2009)

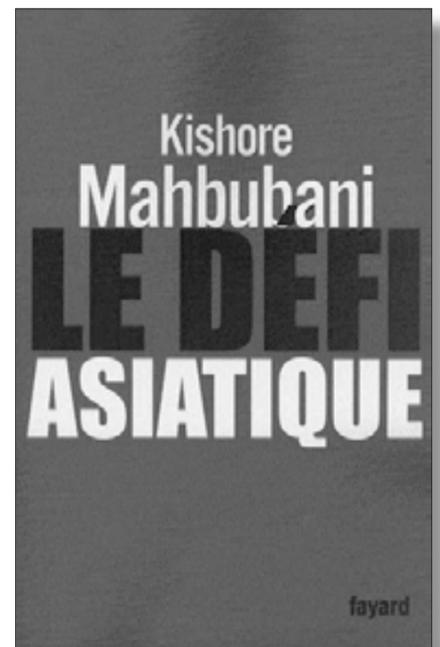
El decano de la escuela para política pública *Lee Kuan Yew* en Singapur, Profesor *Kishore Mahbubani*, no necesitó muchas palabras para decir lo esencial en Munich: «Paradójicamente, en el mundo dominan los viejos criterios, siendo que el mundo necesita nuevos criterios sobre <global governance>. [...] Poniendo emparches no va a funcionar. [...] Estamos llegando al término de 200 años de continua dominación occidental en la historia del mundo. Ninguna de las nuevas potencias es occidental. Sin embargo, occidente se aferra a estar sobrerrepresentado en todas las instituciones que operan en el mundo. [...]

Las grandes potencias no pueden seguir dominando por mucho tiempo la política mundial, como lo hicieron en los siglos 19

y 20. La mayoría de la población mundial no quiere seguir siendo objeto de la política mundial sino el sujeto. Los pueblos quieren tener más control sobre su destino, y que sus intereses dejen de ser ignorados.»

* Casi todos los discursos de la Conferencia de seguridad pueden leerse en *www.security-conference.de*. Ésto es muy recomendable, porque se puede leer lo que se dijo realmente. Por ejemplo, el discurso del vocero del parlamento iraní, *Dr. Ali Laridschani*, que los medios occidentales publicaron en forma tergiversada.

** Siguiendo la misma línea de *Angela Merkel*, el asesor de seguridad de EE.UU., General *James Jones*, citó en Munich al presidente *Obama*: Para hacer frente con éxito a los desafíos del siglo XXI, EE.UU. debería integrar todos los elementos de su red de influencias: «Nuestro ejército y nuestra diplomacia, nuestra economía y servicios de inteligencia, nuestras facultades para imponer el derecho, nuestra influencia cultural y, como lo mencionamos ayer, el poder de nuestro ejemplo moral, en resumen, de nuestros valores».



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Bolivians Adopt a New Constitution

gl. On 25 January, more than 4 million eligible Bolivians went to polls to vote on a new constitution. The text had been approved by the Bolivian Congress in October after months of negotiations with the opposition.

The vote resulted in a clear majority of 62% for the draft proposed by *Evo Morales*' government. The opposition, especially in the eastern, so-called "crescent provinces" of the rich lowlands, which had been trying by all means since the government came to power to prevent a loss of its privileges, managed to get a 38% vote against the text.

Yet only a few months before, it was still not clear whether the vote would be orderly and legal.

In the eastern provinces of Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni, Tarija and Chuquisaca are concentrated, on the one hand, the rich oil and gas deposits and, on the other hand, a relative handful of wealthy families possessing large land holdings, giant latifundia, some of which cover as much as 100,000 hectares. Some 96% of the land in Bolivia is in the hands of 6% of the population, while around 25,000 small farmers have no land at all to till. Bolivia ranks as the poorest country in South America.

Embittered, the oligarchs in the eastern provinces are fighting the redistribution policies of President *Evo Morales* in favor of the poor indigenous populations, and in the course of 2008 they held illegal votes on au-

tonomy for their various provinces. It turned nasty, with serious unrest, barricaded streets, attacks on central government buildings, occupation of the gas fields.

In the province of Pando, a state of emergency was declared when the prefect set in motion a massacre by paramilitary support troops of small farmers at a demonstration. Twenty persons were killed, and the prefect was arrested. This attempt to divide the land and to force the situation into a civil war was also supported by the United States government. The United States Ambassador, *Philip Goldberg*, who previously had also been active in Belgrade, met many times with the prefect of the renegade provinces. Bolivia expelled him.

At the high point of the crisis in mid-September, Bolivia received support from the brother lands of the UNASUR, the Union of South American Nations. In a common declaration of all heads of state and of government, during a special summit meeting about Bolivia in Santiago de Chile, they assured the constitutional government of Bolivia full support and denounced any attempt at civil conflict and threat to the territorial integrity of Bolivia. The "Moneda Declaration" is a historically meaningful step for Latin America, first because all countries, among which distinctly different ones such as Venezuela, Colombia and Brazil, took a common position regarding the defense of democracy in a brother country – and this without mentioning the United States even once.

In view of the background of this very young story, the new Bolivian constitution is not at all greatly enough appreciated, even if some concession had to be made to the opposition provinces.

Exile

How far is a Bolivian mining settlement from a Swedish city? How many miles, centuries, worlds?

Domitila, one of five women who angered a military dictatorship, was sent into exile by another military dictatorship and came here with her husband and four children to the snow of northern Europe.

From there, where all was lacking, to here, where everything exists in abundance, from the depths of adversity to the heights of waste: wondering eyes in these adobe-colored faces. Here in Sweden almost new television sets are thrown into the trash, almost unused clothing, and furniture and refrigerators and stoves and dishwashers that are still

completely usable. Earlier model cars go to the scrap heap.

Domitila is grateful to the Swedes for their solidarity and marvels at their freedom, yet the waste is an affront to her. On the other hand, she has sympathy with their loneliness: the poor rich people alone in front of the television set, drinking alone, eating alone, talking to themselves alone.

"In my country," recounts *Domitila*, "in my country in Bolivia, people gather together, even if it is only to quarrel."

Extract from *Eduardo Galeano, Erinnerung an das Feuer (Memoires of the Fire), 1981, Peter Hammer Verlag, ISBN: 978-377-9500001.*

Latin America Will Not Allow the "Balkanization" of Bolivia

Evo Morales was supported by Ecuadorian President *Rafael Correa*, who stated in his weekly television message the following: "Evo, we will not allow the past to come back. We know very well who these elites are; you can count completely on the support of the Latin American governments and people. We will not allow there to be another *Pinochet* in Latin America, we will not allow the balkanization of the region."

Source: <http://listas.nodo50.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/diariodeurgencia>

The constitution recognizes 36 indigenous peoples of Bolivia along with their traditional beliefs and languages. The state controls the mineral resources, the natural gas, the oil, the water. The right to free health care, to water and to food, to free education is enshrined in the constitution. There are also further political participatory civil rights, including the right to stand for election for office. In a second referendum apart from the one on the constitution, the matter of the large landholdings was specifically decided. Some 80% of the voters were in favor of diminishing the large landholdings to 5,000 hectares of land. On pressure from the eastern provinces, however, this provision will be applied only to future large holdings; the already existing latifundia will not be touched.

It Seemed Gaza Was Stalingrad

Posturing and laughter as victims rot

by Robert Fisk

The front page of the Beirut daily "As-Safir" said it all, 19 January. Across the top was a terrible photograph of the bloated body of a Palestinian man newly discovered in the ruins of his home while two male members of his family shrieked and roared their grief. Below, at half the size, was a photograph from Israel of *Western leaders joking with Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister. Olmert was roaring with laughter. Silvio Berlusconi, arms on the back of Olmert's shoulders, was also joshing and roaring – with laughter, not grief – and on Olmert's right was Nicolas Sarkozy of France wearing his stupidest of smiles. Only Chancellor Merkel appeared to understand the moral collapse. No smiles from Germany.*

Europe laughs while Palestinians mourn their dead. No wonder that in the streets of Beirut, shops were doing a flourishing trade in Palestinian scarves and flags. Even some of Palestine's most serious enemies in Lebanon wore the Palestinian *keffiyeh* in solidarity with the people of Gaza. Over and over again, *Al-Jazeera* television strapped headlines on to their news reports of Palestinians carrying the decomposing corpses of their dead: "More than 1,300 dead in Gaza, 400 of them women and children – Israeli dead in the war 13, three of them civilians." That, too, said it all.

All day, the Arabs also had to endure watching *their own leaders* primping and posing in front of the cameras at the *Arab summit in Kuwait*, where the kings and presidents who claim to rule them also smiled and shook hands and tried to pretend that they were unified behind a Palestinian people who have been sorely betrayed. Even *Mahmoud Abbas* was there, the powerless, impotent leader of "Palestine" – where is that pre-



Gaza 2009. (picture reuters)

cisely, one had to ask? – trying to suck some importance from the coat-tails and robes of his betters.

Slipping and sliding on the corpses of Gaza, these assembled supreme beings should perhaps be pitied. What else could they do? Saudi King *Abdullah* announced £750,000 to rebuild Gaza; but how many times have the Arabs and the Europeans been throwing money at Gaza only to see it torn to shreds by incoming shell-fire?

It has to be said that the two cowed Hamas gunmen who announced that they had won a "victory" in the ruins of Gaza were only fractionally less hypocritical. Still they had not understood that they were not the Hizbollah

of Lebanon. Gaza was no longer Beirut. Now, *it seemed, Gaza was Stalingrad*. But whose uniforms did Hamas think they were wearing: German or Soviet?

"Israel has to understand," the good king said – as if the Israelis were listening – "that the choice between war and peace will not always stay open and that the Arab initiative (for Arab recognition in return for an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders of Israel) that is on the table today will not stay on the table." He knew that "an eye for an eye ... did not say an eye for the eyes of a whole city." But how many times – how many bodies have to be pulled from the ruins – before the Saudis realize *that time has run out?*

The Israelis briskly dismissed "land for peace" in 2002 but on the 19 January they suddenly showed their interest again. "We continue to be willing to negotiate with all our neighbours on the basis of that initiative," the Israeli government spokesmen said – as if his own country's original rejection had never been thrown at the Arabs.

President *Bashar al-Assad* of Syria, of course, dismissed the whole initiative in Qatar last week as dead, insisting that *Israel be declared a "terrorist entity"*. But Mahmoud Abbas stepped further into humiliation yesterday by announcing that the "only option" for Arabs was to make peace with Israel. It was Arab "shortcomings" that led to the failure of the 2002 Arab initiative. Not Israel's rejection, mark you. No, it was all the fault of the Arabs. And this from the leader of "Palestine."

No wonder America's man in Egypt – a certain *Hosni Mubarak* – repeated the tired old slogan that "peace in the Middle East is an imperative that cannot be delayed." And then the Emir of Kuwait invited Bashar and Hosni and King Abdullah of Jordan and the other King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to have lunch together – the menu was not disclosed – to end their feuding.

Al-Jazeera showed the ever-more putrid bodies being tugged from beneath crossbeams and crushed concrete as these mighty potentates debated their little disputes. There was really no adequate comment for this charade.

Robert Fisk is an internationally renowned journalist for the "Independent" in London. His reports on the Middle East provide the readers with the necessary contrast to the official doctrine and inspire activists all over the globe.

Source: www.independent.co.uk

General Delegation of Palestine
Bern-Switzerland

Press Statement

Bern 25 February 2009

The General Delegation of Palestine in Bern strongly condemns the actions initiated by the municipality of West Jerusalem by the demolitions of dozens of homes in the Bustan neighbourhood in Silwan, South of the Old City of the occupied East Jerusalem which is an integral part of the Palestine territories that Israel occupied in her aggression of the 4th of June 1967.

The Municipality of West Jerusalem called for Palestinian residents of the village of Silwan, to evacuate more than eighty homes, built before the occupation of the city, in preparation for the demolition and says that the construction was made without license, in addition of many other Palestinian houses demolition notifications taken every day.

These recent actions taken by the occupation forces and the decision to expand the boundaries of the municipality constitute a flagrant violation of all international law, and all the decisions of the United Nations.

The General Delegation of Palestine in Bern calls upon the Swiss confederation, the international community and the High Contracting Parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention, individually or collectively to act promptly and expeditiously in order to put pressure on the Israeli government to stop such actions, which fall under the Israeli schemes aimed at bringing about demographic changes in the occupied city of Jerusalem for the settlement projects, and to compel the Government of Israel to halt all settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in occupied East Jerusalem, and the removal of Israeli settlements from those territories, and we also call the European Union to work on the implementation of Article II of the Convention on the Israeli European partnership – which requires that Israeli respect the human rights to ensure the continuation of European economic cooperation between the parties.

These actions are considered as war crime according to the rules of international law and the silence of the international community encourages Israel to act as a state above the law, and to commit more violations of all human rights law.

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Merkel's Disgraceful War Course Must Be Stopped

km. Angela Merkel's war course has been going on for 6 years. In February 2003, on the occasion of the *Munich Security Conference*, she explained that she wanted to enter the Iraq war together with the then US President *Bush*, despite all the severe doubts about that war which were already predominant at that time. Since then Merkel has been continuously siding with the warriors. In 2006, she aligned herself with the *Israeli* war criminals during an assault on *Lebanon*, which cost more than 1,200 Lebanese lives, most of them civilians. She did the same with Israel's murderous assault on the *Gaza Strip* in December 2008 and in January 2009, which took the lives of more than 1,400 people, mostly civilians again, above all children. Furthermore, she does not only take part verbally: Germany has repeatedly been accomplice when it came to equipping Israel with weapons for murders. In addition, Merkel does everything she can in order to divert from Israeli war crimes. The same is happening in Afghanistan where she is siding with the war criminals, there. Despite all the protests, no contradictory statement was to be heard from the German Secretary of Defense, when the highest NATO general gave the instruction to execute all drug dealers in Afghanistan.

The German military deployment at the Hindu Kush has been going on for more than 7 years now. Although it was originally veiled as "protection of development and reconstruction work", under the aegis of Merkel those voices were eventually accepted, which advised Germany to leave the assistance and reconstruction work to others and deploy the German Federal Armed Forces for tasks which the commanders wanted them to fulfill. As early as 2005, the commander of the Academy for Information and Communication of the German Federal Armed Forces

– i.e. the propaganda department of the Ministry – said that the German population had to be prepared for the fact that German soldiers would die "in larger numbers" and "kill other people."

At present however, it is primarily the Afghans who die. This winter 2 million Afghan people have been threatened with death, among them 1.4 million children. People who fled from the NATO bombs, must now live in miserable refugee camps and do not even have a tent to protect them from the cold. There are children who run barefoot through the snow, mothers who must sell some of their children in order to be able to get a little food for the remainder of the family. Merkel did not undertake anything to save the lives of these 2 million people – although a single phone call would have been sufficient to initiate the necessary help overnight.

Do not let yourself be fooled. Merkel's pretended simple-mindedness may not fool us about the fact that she has the blood of thousands of innocent people on her hands.

Even *Henry Kissinger*, whom – according to all we know about him – we can rightfully call a mass murderer, was given a *Security Policy Award* on behalf of the chancellor at the occasion of the *Munich Security Conference* – for "extraordinary merits for peace." A prize for a mass murderer, paid with German taxes. For each human being with a clean conscience this means a slap in the face.

Therefore the demand must decidedly be raised: Angela Merkel and her government must immediately stop their inhuman war course! If Merkel does not do so, she must step down; because she is in contradiction to the large majority of the population concerning this important issue, and she is jointly responsible for the severest crimes. •

“We care, you too?”

Project Writing Tables for grade one in Gambia

cc. Sponsored by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO), the first “We care, you too?” award for innovative and effective development projects of socially minded youths was handed out at the Annual Development Cooperation Conference in September 2007. The award is intended to foster innovative projects designed to help surmount poverty, injustice and humanitarian disasters in developing and transition countries. Over 100 project proposals were received whose number and quality far surpassed the expectations and showed that many young people in Switzerland are actively committed to making the world a better place.

In the following article, we present the project of the youth club “Funky” from Illnau, Canton of Zurich/Switzerland.

In April 2007 I, Theresia Baker, head of the youth club Funky in Illnau/Switzerland, was with my husband in Gambia. Since my husband originates from Gambia, I had the possibility of visiting different institutions which would only with difficulty have been accessible to me otherwise as a tourist. The neighbour of our family in Farato is a teacher of grade one at the public school in Farato, Busumbala.

She invited me to visit her class. There are 67 pupils in this class. The classroom is meager and without the necessary seats. The children must sit thronged on the few benches and at the few tables. They can all count to one hundred and say the alphabet. The school language is English.

The children do not speak English when they start school; they speak the different tribal languages, which are spoken in Gambia, Mandinka, Wolof, Fulla or others. Instruction takes place only verbally, because there is no paper. The alphabet, numbers, animal names and other terms are usually taught visually and with the help of music. The children can sing marvelously, but they completely lack writing practice.

When I returned to Switzerland, the young people of the youth club wanted to know everything about my visit in Gambia: How the people live there, what kind of infrastructure exists, what the schools look like, what the people eat, and much more. Our young people were deeply affected by my narrations and asked themselves spontaneously: “What can we do to help the children?”



Both children and teachers are extremely happy about their new writing tables. (Picture Baker)

Thus our project developed

We looked at the photos together, and the kids were indignant that the first graders do not even have paper for writing. There were discussions, we thought about what we could contribute to a change.

The young people are convinced that education can show the way out of poverty. Since we do not have a large budget as a youth club, we considered the following solution: We want to manufacture writing tables. We are convinced of the sustainability of this solution, as our boards can be used by many children.

80 writing and drawing tables

Plywood 6mm, format A3 (297 mm x 420 mm), polished on one side 3 to 4 times and painted with black acrylic colour. The rim is painted black; the other side is polished and then covered with a green blackboard foil. This side of the board gets a special design along the rim, which the young people draw and give their imagination full scope.

We have already had experience with painted plywood boards; in our youth club they serve as signs for special events, opening hours and as a menu board in our food factory. This board has been written on three times a week for five years now, and it can be used for further years.

For painting on the boards, we buy colored chalks, because they are also available and affordable in Gambia. For writing on them, we buy special chalks and the suitable sharpeners. For cleaning the boards, we procure foam material from a manufacturer in our region.

The young people of the youth club do all the work in their free time. Up to now, 15-20 young people have contributed. They are in the ages from 13 to 20 years. One girl is only 10 years old. It is quite possible that until the completion more young people in the club will contribute. The average age will presumably rise.

We hope that until the autumn holidays 2007 the boards will be finished. They are then transported by ship containers to Gambia to their place of destination. A Gambian from Zurich regularly organizes such transportation. The boards will be sent directly to the teacher of the first grade.

Additional measures

We imagine that in a next step we can buy paint for the classroom, so that it can be

colored. The ground must be repaired. And school desks for the children are also urgently necessary. We would like to finish the classroom as a sample room, in order to motivate the responsible authorities to furnish the other classrooms appropriate for children. Of course, the children need also exercise books and writing material as well as learning games, a globe and other things that are necessary for interesting and instructive lessons. Our young people thought about recording a CD with the songs of the pupils, in order to sell them here in Switzerland and thus raise money.

As we have already produced a CD in the club, material, devices and expertise are available.

Manufacturing these boards meant many hours of work. It was great fun, and the boards are impressive. Meanwhile they have arrived in Gambia and are used by the children.

Our kids are ready to commit themselves for a good cause! We can say they have given evidence of their social competence. The young people also have adopted a pleasant conversational language

among each other. It is nice to see that the youth committed themselves to the general well-being and that consumer thought does not predominate.

Project support and co-ordination: Theresia Baker, head of youth club Funky in Illnau.

Source: www.funky-illnau.ch

“If we want to have a single chance of achieving the development goals and establish a better world for all, we must address the young people. We must act rapidly and with open arms. And we must welcome the youth as a partner in the development processes.”

Thoraya Ahmed Obaid,
Executive Director, UNFPA

Source: Brochure DEZA Youth Policy



Lessons only take place orally as there is no writing paper available. (Picture Baker)

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