

Militarism as Cause and Consequence of Climate Change Expulsion of Organizer from COP16 Leads to Cancellation of Press Conference

*from Climate SOS, Biofuel Watch, and Global Compliance
Research Project*

(Cancun, Dec 10, 2010): As climate negotiations in Cancun become increasingly chaotic and the outcomes uncertain, over 70 diverse environmental, peace and social justice organizations declare that on this 62nd International Human Rights Day, we must recognize that all efforts to address climate change or human rights will fail unless we contend with the “elephant in the living room”: militarism, and a logic of Might is Right. The group sent their statement (available at www.climatesos.org) to delegates at the COP16, and to president Obama. On the same website is a factsheet with detailed resources on this topic.

A press conference scheduled for today inside the COP16 had to be cancelled, because its main organizer, Dr. Maggie Zhou, a biologist with Climate SOS, was expelled from the UN climate conference, due to supposedly showing ‘disrespect’ to UN security by demanding an explanation when her badge was forcefully snatched away on Tuesday, following her very marginal participation in a peaceful, non-disruptive demonstration on the conference grounds. The majority of other participants had their badges returned. An interview with Zhou is still on the official UNFCCC website (<http://www.climate-change.tv/maggie-zhou-december-2010>), as of the time of this release.

According to Zhou’s article published in today’s Alter-ECO newsletter (issue #4, see www.climate-justice-now.org), USA alone spends well over \$1 trillion/year on military related expenses, magnitudes higher than the climate ‘assistance’ of \$10 billion/y for 2010-2012, or \$100 billion/y by 2020, from all

developed countries combined! Worse, these climate ‘aid’ pledges under the Copenhagen Accord will come mostly as loan guarantees, private investments for profit, and even recycled aid commitments. She added: “President Barack Obama received the Nobel Peace prize exactly one year ago, although it has done nothing to stop him from further increasing the U.S.’s military budget.”

“Using military force to control access to oil and other resources, at the expense of millions of lives and countless misery, is a clear violation of human rights, while refusing to take strong action on climate change and repay climate debt directly threatens with extinction-scale global human rights violation (the UN high commission has recognized climate change as a direct human rights threat)”, she continued.

The human toll of wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere have been horrific, but extend even further than usually acknowledged: a UN environmental report about the first Gulf War for example, points to the damage inflicted by 70-ton tanks like the M-1 Abrams on the ecology of the desert: Approximately 50% of Kuwait's land area has had its fragile soil surface destroyed as scores of tanks moved out of that country each day, headed for Iraq. This kind of damage to landscapes, along with chemical and radioactive contamination from military operations leaves a legacy of disease, poverty, hunger, and death.

Dr. Rachel Smolker, an ecologist with Biofuwatch observed: “The magnitude of the world’s military funding belies the claim that strong climate actions (or even the extremely weak targets as the current pledges) must depend on profit-driven carbon markets and the commodification of the global commons. While trillions are offered for ongoing warfare, funding to protect forests is made dependent on programs like REDD (which threatens the rights of millions of indigenous peoples, on top of merely providing

polluters an “offset” substitute for reducing their own emissions), and mitigation efforts are focused on false solutions like large scale biofuels (which threaten agriculture, water and land resources, and lead to further deforestation), and Carbon Capture and Sequestration (which enables continued reliance on fossil fuels, and creates an extremely dangerous time bomb, given that storage formations will eventually, inevitably leak, or even, heaven forbid, abruptly fail.)”

The US military is also the world’s largest institutional source of greenhouse gases (equipping, manning, training, and transporting for military operations and bases, patrolling oil shipping routes for what’s dubbed “oil protection service”, etc.), while causing massive ecosystem destruction worldwide. According to rankings in the 2006 CIA World Factbook, only 35 countries (out of 210 in the world) consume more oil per day than the Pentagon, who refers to fuel consumption in terms of "gallons per mile," "gallons per minute," and "barrels per hour." Yet, none of this was discussed in any climate negotiations.

According to Dr. Joan Russow, of Global Compliance Research Project, “The US military operates in the shadows of climate negotiations, having demanded that their emissions be exempted from scrutiny or regulation. This absolutely cannot continue: the climate crisis has reached the point where all of life – now and for future generations – is threatened. We cannot just ignore the largest polluter on earth, fight more wars over access to oil, and continue to feed this vicious cycle!”

Ironically, even the Pentagon recognizes that climate change is a “threat multiplier”, that will result in mass migrations, and far *more* wars and conflicts, threatening US “national security”. But their response is more of the same: build up fortress America, and run the military on liquefied coal and biofuels to reduce reliance on foreign oil. Their total disregard for human rights around the

world is apparent from a 2003 Pentagon report, which calculated dispassionately: “Deaths from war as well as starvation and disease will decrease population size, which overtime, will re-balance with carrying capacity.”

“What the imperialist warlords don’t understand”, said Zhou, “is that no one nation or elite class can survive the climate catastrophe without saving the planet as a whole, given the multitude of interconnectedness of the earth’s eco- and geophysical/chemical/climate systems. In fact, allowing massive suffering in ‘unimportant’ regions will logically lead to further decimation of ecosystems and the transfer of their biomass carbon into the atmosphere, as people will be driven to seeking out the last of water and sustenance amid crop failures, droughts and wildfires... We are literally one people, sharing one fate. Human rights is not only a moral issue, it has very sound physical and existential basis.”

The groups demand an end to militarism, that the impacts of militarism be fully and transparently assessed, and that the multi-trillion USD world military budgets be redirected towards domestic and international obligations to ensure adequate human rights, and enabling real solutions to the climate crisis.

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