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Human and environmental rights in the debates of the Green Climate Fund

A step back and a need

Currently, debates are held in Paris on the framework of the Green Climate Fund of the United Nations. The purpose of this instrument is to fund processes, policies, strategies, plans and projects that aim to combat and adapt to the impact of climate change, especially in southern countries. It's unbelievable that the discussions which are taking place in the French capital force us to talk about themes that, after long social and political struggles, have already been commonplace for decades. Transparency of governance, active participation of civil society in decision-making processes and transparent management of international public resources are just a few of the discussed themes, as well as the protection of indigenous peoples, respect for the national sovereignty of countries, the protection of biological and cultural diversity and respect for human rights.

All these themes have been laid down and guaranteed in various international treaties, such as the Convention of Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention for the Protection of Indigenous Peoples and the Convention to Combat Desertification, and also in the human rights treaties which most Member States of the United Nations have signed. Within this context, the Green Climate Fund should be an instrument for the active and targeted implementation of the Convention of Climate Change and the policies of countries to combat climate change, with a good basis for action in which the principles and rights in the international treaties should be taken as a guideline.

But during the meeting in France it becomes clear how international financial institutions operate, how they try to manage and control resources at the expense of national sovereignty and how their decisions, policies and strategies are based on economic criteria, without taking into account the social and environmental implications. The people that take part in and lead the debates and those who have a say in the design of the fund are politicians and specialists who execute the economic policies of their country the bank they represent. Environment does not seem to be a big issue; representatives engaged with environmental policies are hard to be found at the meeting. This can be seen as proof that the instrumental and purely economic thinking has prevailed. This Fund against climate change has been established by representatives of the very model that has caused climate change. When negotiating the details, other relevant knowledge is not being taken into account at all, while the topics are very difficult and complex. Large banks, like the Brazilian bank BNDES, the Latin American Development bank (CAF) and other financial institutions are trying to influence the process and to defend their interests.

The civil society organisations present are also trying to influence the policy. But often we have to take a step back in the debate to make sure that fundamental as well as new rights are being respected (especially international public and environmental rights), as though these rights were never approved by the United Nations. In the twenty-first century, civil society organizations are calling for exactly the same things that social movement and democracies already reached at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This is of course absurd and it only shows the complexity and insanity of current international power structures. Here in Paris we are direct witnesses of this process of economic power; we see commercial enterprises trying to get a hold of public resources that are meant to protect our planet against climate change. People are convinced that major climatic companies will save mankind. Are we really mistaking if we think this is a delusion?

There seems to be a huge step back and the most relevant issue in the process is kept out of the discussion: how can we finance developing countries in a generous and solidary way while respecting their democracy, culture and strategies, to enable them to implement policies

to combat climate change? We can only do this if we understand that the Green Climate Fund is a tool, not a revealing truth meant to save the fundamentals of blind capitalism.

The first essential step is that civil society organisations and local people help strengthen and form the national institutions that will become responsible for the application process and for executing the policies of the Green Climate Fund in their countries. It is also very important that these organisations and people have direct access to the Fund without having to apply via multilateral banks like the World Bank. Otherwise, there is a big chance that nothing changes and that the money will not make its way to the ones who need it most: the people affected by climate change, making a living in vulnerable sectors like small scale agriculture and living in important ecosystems. If civil society will not be heard in the Green Climate Fund, the Fund will be nothing more than empty words, funding unnecessary infrastructural megaprojects, allowing corrupt procurement procedures and obscure financial business.