

OPEN LETTER REGARDING THE HELSINKI PROCESS

We thank you for inviting us to join the 2005 Helsinki Conference, which was the outcome of the Helsinki Process initiated at the "Democracy & Globalisation" conference in December 2002. As participants in the Helsinki Process and co-owners of the agenda, we wish to give our assessment of the process to date, highlighting accomplishments and limitations, and suggesting key elements and directions for future work.

The Helsinki Process is based on the idea of South-North partnerships including states, academia, the world of business, movement leaders, NGOs, political workers and policy planners to bring global economic justice, human security, fresh approaches to global problem-solving and comprehensive democratisation. The Helsinki Process, with its allusion to the momentous 1975 conference on European security and cooperation, breathes new life into the tradition of Nordic countries as social democracies striving for equality, freedom and prosperity. In addition, the founding role of the governments of Tanzania and Finland sets an example of leadership exercised by small non-aligned states in the efforts to democratise globalisation.

For these reasons, we the undersigned political workers, activists, public intellectuals and artists congratulate the organisers of this initiative that, at a minimum, provides a space for ambitious political dreaming and planning. Having extended our warm welcome, we feel it is also important to assess the last three years of the Helsinki Process, identifying accomplishments, shortcomings as well as areas and directions for future work. We will conclude this letter with an expanded agenda for future directions, with the intention of making them a core part of the Helsinki Process.

THE 2002 OPEN LETTER: ACCOMPLISHMENTS & LIMITATIONS

In 2002, a group of individual friends of the Helsinki Process submitted an open letter to the Finnish Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja. The friends thanked him for his invitation to take part in this promising new initiative. At the same time, they identified four areas of concern where the Helsinki Process appeared inadequate. We present below a summary of each of those points, along with our assessment of the degree to which the Helsinki Group acknowledged and addressed these issues.

1. Counter the militarisation of globalisation, most clearly evident in the the so-called "war on terror."

RESULT: This issue was not addressed adequately. No significant steps were taken to analyse, censure or solve the crises created by the massive increase in global, inter-connected militarism. Our stance in this matter has been vindicated by subsequent developments, and even many former supporters of military solutions have begun expressing doubts about this policy.

2. Helsinki Process must itself become a model of democratic practice, like the WSF model, by including the marginalised and oppressed people as participants, owners and leaders. Modes of communication must expand beyond those that favour an English-speaking elite with access to technology and funds.

RESULT: This is an area of some notable success. The core group has included civil society members who work with the marginalised groups, although not yet, it must be noted, the marginalised groups themselves. The fact that the Finnish government has joined forces with the Tanzanian government can be considered a breakthrough in making Southern nations co-owners of the process. This has been accompanied by a general increase in efforts to make Southern voices stronger in the Helsinki Group. Resources, financial and otherwise, have been directed to addressing this issue. The Helsinki Process has also attempted to act as a bridge between the World Social Forum and the World Economic Forum. Compared to other global, government-level meets, the Helsinki Process has been relatively transparent. While some barriers exist due to language and technology access, many have been able to access the proceedings of the Helsinki Process with relative ease.

3. Focus on the debt crisis by means of a comprehensive systemic resolution, including audit of legitimacy of existing debt, cancellation of illegitimate debts and creating a new process for fair resolution of the debt crisis.

RESULT: It is our assessment that the debt crisis has not been addressed with due seriousness. Some discussions have occurred at the "Track" level, but these have not produced any new initiatives.

4. Democratise the process of global governance, including reform of global and national institutions and introduction of multilateral solutions. Promote a democratic and thorough review of existing WTO agreements, including the TRIPS regime, leading to recommendations for reform of the WTO. Analysis of the Currency Transaction Treaty (CTT), with the intention of providing concrete recommendations.

RESULT: No concrete initiatives have come in this regard.

OUR AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

In conclusion we propose an agenda which we believe is critical for the Helsinki Process to move forward, be more effective and create concrete solutions and policy changes. This agenda is a combination of the issues we raised at the Helsinki meet in 2002, and the additional issues that have come up in an interconnected and rapidly changing world.

1. Peace Through Justice & Non-violence

Work for a commitment to non-aggression and bring egalitarian disarmament back to the centre-stage of the international agenda. Recognise the right to self-defence and endorse non-violent action based on mass participation against oppression and militarism. Oppose the continuing reliance on military solutions to global problems, exemplified by the so-called "war on terror" and other military actions, especially those that target civilian populations. Resist the manufacture of hatred against religious and ethnic minorities. Promote dignified livelihood for all in order to reduce global conflict; reduce national defence expenditures and control the global arms trade. Oppose the use of mercenary forces that bring privatisation to war zones such as Iraq and transfer accountability for war crimes from governments to private contractors. Strengthen global courts' power to investigate abuses by nations, including the use of client-states to carry out detention and torture in the "war on terror."

2. Democratic Global Institutions

Democratise the process of international relations and negotiations, including the reform of global and national institutions. Promote a democratic and thoroughgoing review of international financial and economic regimes, including the WTO, and Bretton Woods institutions, requiring them to submit to binding human rights and environmental commitments globally, including steps for free movement of labour. Instead of undermining the current

democratic multilateral institutions, through proposals such as the enlargement of the G8, democratise and strengthen the UN system. Define and promote international financial mechanisms that promote global economic justice and redistribution, including the Currency Transaction Tax Treaty (CTT).

3. Comprehensive Democratisation

Promote comprehensive democracy, including people's participation, ecological democracy, and political accountability at all levels. Strengthen local, grassroots initiatives that have national impact. Act in solidarity against threats to democracy, including regional interventions by superpowers, military and other forms of dictatorship, neo-liberal attacks on democratic institutions and structures and curbs on democracy imposed by lawfully elected governments. Harness the potential of people's participatory democratic practices and systems. Economic and ecological democracy are interdependent and inseparable from the equal right to a clean and healthy environment and the sustainable use of local natural resources. No outsiders such as TNCs should have control of natural resources without permission from the local people and communities. The shared aspirations of the Helsinki Process will not be fulfilled without ecological democracy.

4. Economic Democracy

Focus on the debt crisis, including the establishment of an independent debt arbitration court, auditing of the legitimacy of existing debt, and the cancellation of illegitimate debts. The majority of the world's population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods, therefore the fight against poverty, even when it encompasses debt cancellation and aid, will be ineffective without an end to current agricultural subsidy regimes in the North. TNCs must be subject to binding, democratic regulatory regimes, which are economically just and environmentally sound, set up by nations and local communities, individually or collectively. Engage state and local governments in expanding and improving public services, and oppose the privatisation and commodification of public services and natural resources, water in particular. Create political and legal mechanisms that remove tax havens.

5. Human Rights For All

Act for the protection of minority rights, including religious, ethnic, linguistic and other minorities and promote gender equality. Steps must be taken to discourage all forms of racial profiling, stigmatisation and religious stereotyping. Expand our focus to migrant ("legal" and "illegal") communities marginalised in Northern and Southern nations, as part of the protection of comprehensive human rights.

6. Inclusion of Marginalised Majorities

Expand the inclusion of marginalised and dispossessed majorities, such as women, youth, farmers, indigenous people, agricultural workers, industrial workers, unorganised labour, subsistence and informal livelihood populations. The Helsinki Process should advance practical mechanisms beyond mere listening, including institutionalised, proactive, inter-continental and public dialogues on issues selected by marginalised populations. State, international and corporate institutions must enter binding commitments to respond publicly and in writing to the concerns raised. Concrete steps should be taken within two years.

7. Last Person First

The legitimacy of all the societal institutions must rest on the principle of "Last Person First": the economic and social performance and the legal framework of governments and international organisations should consistently refer to the rights of the most marginalised and oppressed people as the defining measure of success. The Helsinki Process should advance dialogues, research and action with this end in view.

In conclusion, we would like to say that globalisation of the economy of over-consumption has produced threats to stable life on earth, but the majority of humanity has been able to live for millenniums in informal, indigenous, low-intensity and sustainable livelihood systems.

Therefore, to preserve life on earth, the international community must establish channels by which the Southern majority can get an equal say in guiding policies that affect the entire globe. The strength of South-North democratic dialogue on issues of importance to mankind lies in recognising both common grounds and differences among all participants.

We look forward to working with you to make this unified agenda a reality.

Sincerely, Individual Friends of the Helsinki Process

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