

Non-Aligned fears 'unipolar world'

by Lydia Cherry

At the 30th annual meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Accra, Ghana the first week in September, there were echoes of that movement which, under Mrs. Indira Gandhi's tenure, had forcefully addressed the debt issue and fought for a New World Economic Order. It was the first gathering of the 103-nation grouping since the Gulf war, and a new element was interjected: how to shift focus away from the East-West divide to the gulf between the North and South, with apparent agreement that the Non-Aligned Movement must represent the South.

Although the Gulf war was nowhere mentioned in the final "Accra Declaration," it was clearly in the background of the discussions. As Tanzania's foreign minister put it: "The Non-Aligned Movement is useful as a means of ensuring that the United States does not misuse its power as the one superpower by oppressing developing countries." In a speech entitled "Association of the Poor to Rescue the Wretched," Ivory Coast Foreign Minister Yaoua Kouman noted that with the Soviet Union "very much weakened, this leaves a free hand to the United States," which has become "the master of the world—which we saw in the Gulf war." Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar stressed that "power-associated arrogance is potentially destructive not only to Third World countries but also to the nations that possess this power."

The plight of Africa was a focus of discussion. Foreign Minister Ali Alatas of Indonesia, the country that will become the next head of NAM, noted in his speech that "Africa provides acute relevance to the demand for greater equality, justice, and balance in international relations." The African group at the ministerial meeting attempted to put content behind the words, urging NAM to put its weight behind the call for an international conference on debt. Speaking for the group, Nigerian Foreign Minister Maj. Gen. Ike Nwachukwu said the improvement of the economic situation in Africa has become "a matter of life and death." He noted that, considering the economic indices and the size of Africa's debts, they "are not payable or even serviceable in their present form." Creditor countries must, as a first step, agree to a complete suspension of debt service, he said.

Indian External Affairs Minister Madhavsinh Solanki issued a call "for a development consensus for this decade." He counterposed this to the attempts to choke off develop-

ment under the guise of the environmentalist movement and human rights issues. He noted that India would strongly oppose the current efforts to impose conditions relating to disarmament, human rights, and the environment as prerequisites for receiving financial assistance. He also called upon the grouping to evolve a comprehensive and integrated strategy on international debt to promote sustained development.

The ministerial meeting was opened Sept. 6 by Ghana's President Jerry Rawlings, who said that the major problems "besetting our movement are the direct results of the economic difficulties encountered in the '80s. . . . Creditor countries of the North enjoy a leverage unprecedented since colonialization. . . . The over 4 million people who live in developing countries are about 80% of the world's population, yet our production is valued at less than 20% of global output; our share in world trade is only a little more than 15%." The Ghanaian President paid special tribute to the memory of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, who, Rawlings noted, had worked tirelessly in the Non-Aligned Movement.

Will NAM act?

Yet it was Rajiv Gandhi who was known to have believed, shortly before his death, that NAM, already weakened, had been one of the first casualties of the Anglo-American war against Iraq, because it had done absolutely nothing to stop that war.

The conference took place the same week that U.S. Vice President Dan Quayle arrived in Nigeria. Speaking in Lagos Sept. 13, he rejected any discussion of a debt write-off, declaring simply: "The debt must be paid." The same week the U.S. suspended aid to Zaire because of "human rights abuses and failure to meet the terms of economic reform programs," according to U.S. Ambassador Melissa Wells. That same week, the World Bank also suspended all funding to Zambia because the Kaunda government has failed to meet a \$20.8 million arrears payment.

The Accra Declaration is a disappointment. Iraqi Foreign Minister Ahmad Hussein had challenged NAM that its "opposition to the attempts to destroy Iraq and starve its people will confirm its defense of the principles it embraces." Yet the declaration takes no stand on the continued imposition of sanctions on Iraq. Furthermore, it does not mention the problem of the debt. The "consensus" rightly concludes that "the focus must now be on the eradication of poverty, hunger, malnutrition and illiteracy." But no reference is made to AIDS or even disease. The document cites the grouping's commitment to "environmental protection" and says the countries will fulfill "our due responsibilities . . . to achieve sustainable development."

The Indian press gave scant coverage to the meeting and conveyed a sense of discouragement. However, *The Hindu*, the daily that tends to represent the thinking of the Foreign Ministry, insisted that NAM is more "relevant" and necessary for the world today than at any time in its history.