

# FOCUS

ACTION FOR GLOBAL JUSTICE



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*Sign at a protest on climate change in Copenhagen, December 2009. Photo: Ian McCafferty.*



**Credits & Contact details**

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Honorary Patron, Mary Robinson.

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# Charity alone will never change the world



## Join Comhlámh: take action for global justice

In a world that seems so unfair, don't you wish that Ireland would stand up for justice? Yet there have been moments to be proud of when Ireland helped make a difference:

- against **apartheid**
- for the freedom of **East Timor**
- for **debt cancellation**

But these breakthroughs only happen because people - like you - **demand change and make justice matter.**

For **35 years**, Comhlámh (Irish for 'solidarity' and pronounced 'co-law-ve') has been **educating** and campaigning for global justice in **solidarity with the developing world.**

Our members **challenge the root causes** of injustice and inequality - **globally and locally.**

**You can join in campaigns**

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- against **racism**
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Join our activist network at [www.myspace.com/comhlamh](http://www.myspace.com/comhlamh)

# Action: Write to the Minister on EPAs

## EPAs Endanger Africa's Development

Comhlámh has been campaigning on EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements – Free Trade deals being negotiated between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries – see overleaf for more information) for many years, alongside other trade justice organisations and movements across Ireland, Europe and the world. The action of campaigners, including you, has made a difference. Ireland is one of the countries in Europe which takes a progressive stand on EPAs, regularly speaking up to raise the concerns of developing countries about these trade deals, and to call for more flexibility. This would not have happened without public pressure from campaigners voicing their concern to policy-makers and their political representatives.

However, the negotiation of EPAs are ongoing, and while continuing to raise concerns about some aspects of EPAs at EU meetings, the Irish government is also currently putting forward 3 of the deals to the Dail for ratification, in spite of the fact that the concerns of the countries involved have not been dealt with by Europe's trade negotiators.

We need to remind the Irish government that trade justice campaigners haven't stopped paying attention to EPAs and are still very concerned about them. The various global crises, including financial, climate, and food, have wrought havoc around the world and poor people locally and globally are suffering the negative impacts of unfettered liberalisation and free trade. Ireland can play a positive role by intervening to prevent the EU from forcing dangerous deals based on a failed economic model upon developing countries.

**You can make a difference. Take Action Now.**

## What YOU can do:

It is critical that we express our disapproval of these agreements and seek to ensure that poor people's jobs and livelihoods are protected. Help influence Ireland's approach to these agreements by taking action now!

Write a short note to the Minister of State for Overseas Development (Peter Power TD) outlining your concerns regarding the EPAs, their potentially devastating impact on developing countries, and the ongoing contradiction and incoherence between Europe's Aid and its Trade policies. Call on him to sustain and develop his progressive position on EPAs, so that Ireland is a country that acts in solidarity with our partners in the Global South.

### Minister of State for Overseas Development

**Peter Power TD**

Irish Aid

Department of Foreign Affairs

Riverstone House,

23 - 27 Henry Street, Limerick

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Telephone: 01 408 2000

**For more information on this issue check out [www.comhlamh.org/campaigns](http://www.comhlamh.org/campaigns)**

**Bloom is:**



# So what's the big deal with EPAs?

## What are EPAs?

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) are free trade deals which are being negotiated between the EU and 76 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. The deals were supposed to have been concluded by the end of 2007, but still, more than two years later, many countries and regions have refused to sign. The delay in getting agreements has occurred because developing countries are not willing to sign up to deals they believe will be harmful to their economies.

## What is the current state of play?

The Caribbean region is the only one which has signed a full regional agreement, while some countries (such as Cote D'Ivoire and Cameroon) have signed or initialled individual agreements, and some regions have seen some but not all of the players in the region signing or initialling agreements (such as the SADC agreement, which has been signed by 4 of the 7 countries involved). Overall more than half of the ACP (40 countries) have not initialled any form of EPA, insisting they will only sign if their concerns about the deals are addressed. For detailed information on the current state of play see [http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/get\\_involved/campaign/stop\\_epas/faq/epas\\_how\\_many\\_signed](http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/get_involved/campaign/stop_epas/faq/epas_how_many_signed).

## What are the problems with EPAs?

People who believe in the importance of trade justice in Europe and in ACP countries have identified numerous problems with these deals. Some key issues include:

**Regional Disintegration:** These trade deals were supposed to see the EU promoting its own model of economic development externally, by facilitating and strengthening the regional integration of ACP countries. However this has not been the case. The blocs which the EU decided to negotiate with do not reflect historically existing regional arrangements. Moreover when the EU has not succeeded in getting a regional deal, it has signed deals with smaller blocs of countries, or even individual countries, thus disrupting regional arrangements and causing discord among regional partners.

**Negative Impacts:** It is feared that the EPAs could have very negative impacts on the economies of ACP countries involved. The deals could lead to significant job losses, and the disappearance of small and emerging industries which would be unable to compete with European companies. This would leave the countries involved unable to develop economically, and locked into endless dependence on the export of commodities (whose prices often fluctuate significantly) and raw materials, rather than moving up the value chain and developing other industries which would bring about more indigenous wealth. Moreover the deals would see governments losing significant amounts of their overall revenue (in some cases up to 40%), due to the reduction of tariffs, thus leading to a reduced capacity to fund vital services to their populations, including healthcare and education. There are also concerns that these deals could impact negatively on ACP countries' food security.

**Going Beyond WTO:** The EU is insisting that these agreements are necessary to adhere to WTO rules. However

in fact what is being looked for from ACP countries goes far beyond what is being discussed at WTO level. Developing countries have refused to discuss a number of issues such as services, government procurement, competition and investment at the WTO. But the EU is trying to push smaller groups of countries into giving significant and dangerous concessions on these areas in the EPAs.

**The negotiation process:** This has been unfair, with ACP negotiators and decision-makers sometimes being put under immense pressure to sign deals, or threatened with a loss of access to EU markets. The deals are supposed to take into consideration different countries' levels of development. However research has shown that of the deals signed thus far, the countries which got the most favourable deals were not the poorest, but those with the strongest negotiating capacity. Indeed the Namibian Ambassador to the EU observed in Dublin last year that he had initialled the agreement "under duress", and described the EPA negotiation process overall as being like "pitching a Grandmaster at Chess in a game against someone who has had the rules of the game explained to them once".

## What are campaigners and organisations from ACP regions saying?

- The former president of Tanzania, Benjamin Mkapa, recently warned that the EPAs could be "another scramble for Africa", and that they could weaken regional blocs and stifle Africa's growth.
- The South Centre has written that "the EPAs provide the wrong development model for Africa, and will jeopardize African countries' development and regional integration prospects, rather than support them".
- Dot Keet, a South African trade justice campaigner, has warned that the prolonged period of economic uncertainty and change which the global recession will result in adds a fresh reason for ACP governments not to sign EPAs and reduce their policy space; "Countries of the South are going to need every possible policy flexibility and autonomy to cope with the coming crises" she said. "This is not a time to be tying government's hands"

## Now is Not the Time

The EU suggests that there is no alternative to the EPAs due to the need to adhere to WTO rules. However a number of potential alternatives have been suggested by policy think tanks and civil society actors, but the EU is unwilling to explore them. It is clear that ACP countries should not be forced to sign deals which will leave them economically worse off. Moreover, right now Europe is in disarray, as its own economic model and practice of liberalisation and deregulation unravels, with drastic consequences for the more vulnerable parts of society. Surely now is not the time to be insisting on exporting a failed model of liberalisation to developing countries, while Europe is in the process of re-regulating many areas of its own economy, most notably financial services?

**For more information on EPAs see**

[www.epawatch.eu](http://www.epawatch.eu) - [www.bilaterals.org](http://www.bilaterals.org) - [www.southcentre.org](http://www.southcentre.org)  
[http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/get\\_involved/campaign/stop\\_epas](http://www.traidcraft.co.uk/get_involved/campaign/stop_epas)

# Haiti

## The Uncomfortable Truth

*January's earthquake in Haiti has crippled a country that already faced major challenges, writes **Stephen Kelly** from Port au Prince.*



Orphaned children: Juevant District Port au Prince - Stephen Kelly

**W**aiting for dawn to arrive, as the rain continues to fall in lines from angry clouds over Port au Prince, I think of the many hundreds of thousands of homeless people living under nothing more than some plastic sheeting, lying on a wet blanket at best or, at worst, in a muddy, sewage-filled pit where people are forced to eke out an existence. Some say these are the lucky ones.

The earthquake that hit Port au Prince and surrounding areas on January 12, 2010 killed an estimated 230,000 people, most in the first seven seconds. Corpses still lie entombed under tonnes of rubble all around the city.

What was once a four-storey primary school where 800 children eagerly studied their lessons, is now a mound of twisted metal and concrete. Workers manually breaking away at the rubble wear face masks to help avoid the smell of rotting flesh emanating from within. Further down the street lies a hospital standing no more than six feet off the ground. The hundreds of patients trapped there when the quake hit would have mostly met their fate quickly and, hopefully, painlessly. I am told a digger is coming next week to clear the rubble away.

Why did the 7.0 magnitude earthquake have such a devastating impact on the lives of Haitians? To answer this question, one needs to look at how history has shaped the socio-political and economic landscape of Haiti today. The country has been continuously abused by global superpowers attempting to control local resources and to have a strategic base for access to local and regional markets. The Spanish annihilated the local population in the 1600s while the French caused excessive environmental degradation the impact of which is visible to this day. Mass importation of African slaves took place throughout the 1700s while, more recently, Haiti has been on the receiving end of significant U.S. political interference during the last decades of the 20th century.

For years the U.S. government channelled colossal sums of money to the corrupt, autocratic and murderous Duvalier leadership, in return for a high level of compliance with requests directly from Washington. This relationship came at the expense of equitable, transparent development. Much of this money was taken by a select few who enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle while millions of Haitian citizens struggled to feed themselves. Not only did the U.S. government prop up violent regimes, but it is heavily suspected of playing a direct role in the removal of Aristide, the then only second democratically-elected president, in 2004.

The effects of this long history of international interference are still palpable today for the millions of people who were living in the direst of circumstances, even before the earthquake hit. This natural disaster has compounded an already difficult situation and pushed people to the very brink of what is humanly bearable.

To address the situation of the hundreds of thousands of homeless as a matter of urgency, damaged buildings need to be made safe by demolition. Many thousands are living in the open because they are too afraid to return to their damaged homes. Regular tremors are bringing already unsafe structures crashing to the ground in seconds. Governments need to turn their words into action and commit sufficient funds to contract a large construction consortium to remove rubble and demolish damaged buildings.

With Haiti ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world (13th out of 180) this process needs to be fair, open and transparent using a Haitian workforce and resources wherever possible. Ingrained corruption, which is common in many countries that struggle to pay salaries and lack accountable leaders, is a major obstacle to

*What the Haitians need is not more bilateral aid and interference from the West but a change in foreign policy that enables Haitians to have a greater say in the future of their country.*

development. Working and doing business here is a constant battle with high transactions costs, phantom fees and endless bribes. A drastic change is needed but this will not happen overnight. Moreover, international actors and companies need to ensure they behave responsibly and do not perpetuate corruption by offering bribes.

The next step of the plan would involve rebuilding the city, potentially using private investment and multi-lateral and non-refundable donations with checks, balances, and monitoring and evaluation taking place throughout the process. This is going to be exceptionally difficult to secure in the context of shrinking budgets in many developed countries, but this is something that we need to pressurise our governments into.

A crippling 25 per cent of Haiti's public debt at the end of 2008 was owed to external creditors with most of this being owed to the Inter-American Development Bank. With the destruction on January 12 of an already poor infrastructure, and a small export market base, the odds are certainly stacked against economic development as things stand.

Better security and infrastructure is needed to catalyse responsible foreign investment (including that from successful Haitian diasporas) leading to jobs and a higher standard of living thus creating a middle-class that would steady the country on the path to future development. What the Haitians need is not more bilateral aid and interference from the West but a change in foreign policy that enables them to have a greater say in the future of their country.

Foreign powers must avoid becoming politically involved at all costs. They need to stop supporting particular elements in the Haitian political system, knowingly or otherwise, which prolong the status quo of underdevelopment. There is a very thin line separating government capacity-building and supporting a corrupt regime. Any intervention by the international community needs to be very well planned, designed and implemented.

After being knocked from pillar to post by greedy foreign governments supporting undemocratic, opaque and unfair institutions over the centuries, the positive outlook of those Haitians who have survived the earthquake is truly amazing.

To date the response from the international community has been piecemeal. If this does not change, Haitians will still be living under plastic sheeting in years to come with no schools for their children, no hospitals for their sick and no proper services to allow them live with dignity.

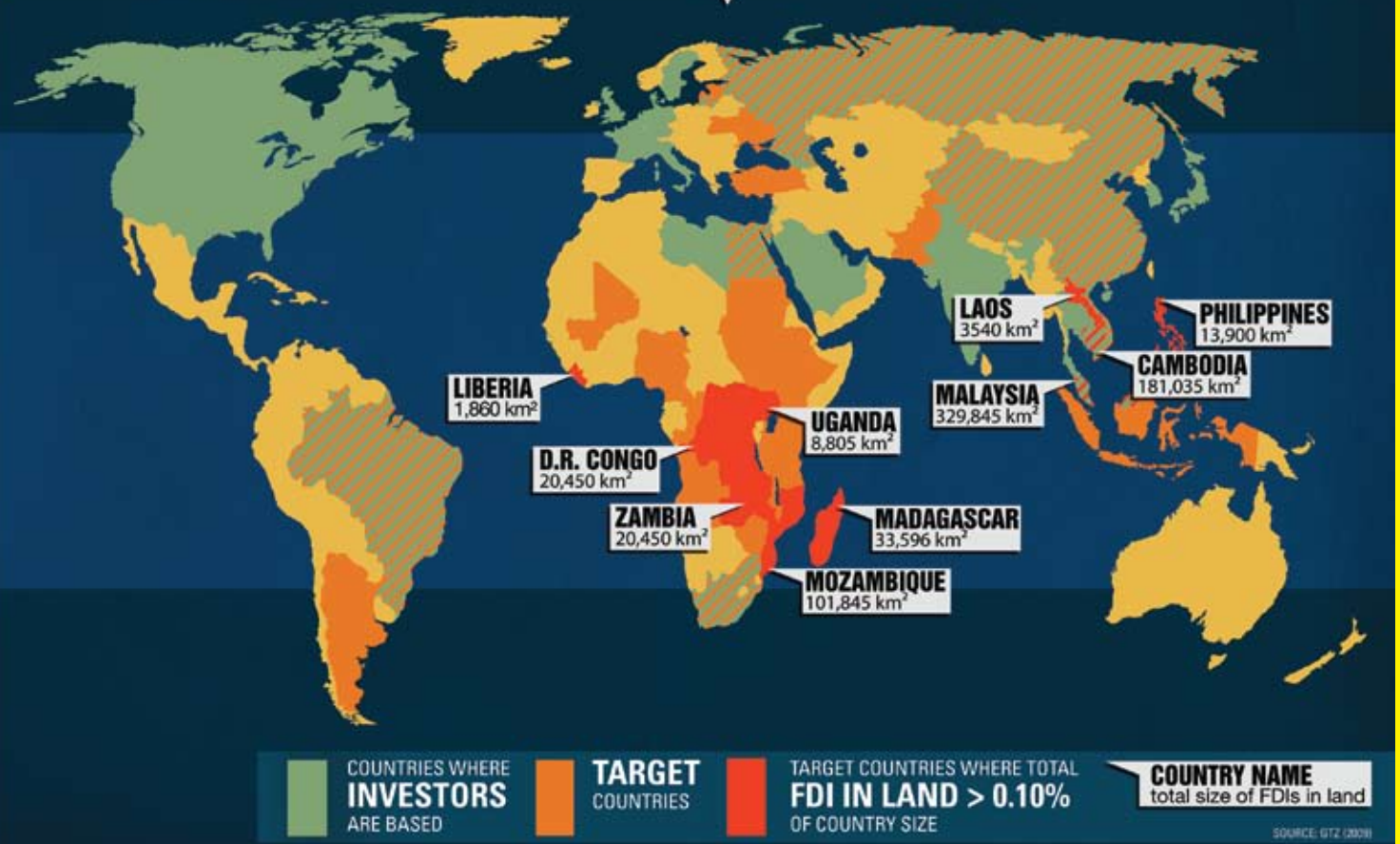
The international community cannot continue to turn a blind eye to what has happened in Haiti both before and after January 12, 2010. The responsibility to share knowledge openly, work in transparent partnership with the Haitian government and jointly address the multitude of problems must be borne by the relevant actors to ensure a better quality of life for the people of Haiti.

# What's the deal?

Looking into the business of foreign direct investment in land.

*Chloé Saint-Ville, Maren Graser and Miren Maialen Samper explore the recent surge in what critics refer to as 'land-grabbing'*

## FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT IN LAND WHICH COUNTRIES ARE INVOLVED?



**F**ood security has become a major global issue since the emergence of a food crisis in 2008. Many countries which rely on food imports became anxious about their dependence on world market supply and turned towards foreign direct investment (FDI) in land. Control over farm land abroad secures food supply. While the financial markets were subsequently collapsing, there was a surge in investment in arable land internationally driven purely by economic interests. Many countries of the developing world have sold or leased between 20 and 40 million hectares of land. (estimates vary greatly) and are competing more than ever against each other to attract investment. This poses the question as to what their motivation is; what benefits can be expected from a trend that is met with scepticism by many NGOs and farmers' organisations?

#### **Who does it benefit?**

For investors the benefits are straightforward. Countries like the Gulf States, China, South Korea and India, which are less and less able to feed their populations, primarily due to a lack of agriculturally viable land, or increased population numbers, reduce their dependency on imports by producing food abroad. Conversely, private investors see the potential profit that the business of hunger holds. Amidst the financial crisis, one form of investment is secure and very profitable: buying or leasing cheap farm land in a developing country. This land will become highly sought after as the consequences of climate change kick in, turning hunger into an even bigger problem than it already is.

#### **What are the risks?**

This situation is every investor's dream: the return outweighs the risk by far. As long as FDIs are based on short three page legal contracts which contain few obligations for the investor (in some cases the harvest doesn't have to be kept in the country even in times of food shortages) the risks for the buyer are low. But what about the target country? The willingness of governments in the Global South to give away their lands is based on the hope that the investor will create employment, improve the country's infrastructure and bring the necessary know-how and technology to increase agricultural efficiency.

Even if a foreign investor were to increase efficiency, the target country hardly benefits as the produce is more than likely exported from the country, explains Lamine Coulibaly of the Coordination Nationale des Organisations Paysannes (CNOP - which consists of 11 Malian farmers organisations and tries to shape agricultural policy in favour of family farming) in an interview with this magazine. History teaches us that often what has been done to "help" developing countries, has in fact resulted in profit for everyone except the countries themselves. This new trend of what critics call "land-grabbing" demonstrates that FDI in land should be approached cautiously. Indeed, both the EU and USA are also suspected by some of using food security as a pretext to push the neo-liberal agenda.

In many cases, land ownership is far from clear with property documentation not necessarily systematised. Many of the big deals are decided without consulting those who live on and from the land. Not only are they powerless because of missing paper work, but many are often illiterate and/or simply unaware of their rights. Lamine Coulibaly cites cases in Mali, where negotiations take place only at presidential level, "When the Malibya project [which entails 100,000 ha] was agreed with Libya, the department for agriculture was only informed two months after."

Excluded from the decision-making process, the local population is often left only with the hope of being employed by the new "farm owner" in what becomes an industrialised agribusiness. They are

## *Robust agricultural laws tackling land property issues and infrastructural needs must be implemented.*

often faced with poor working conditions or simply no work at all, if the investor imports the work force from elsewhere, as in the case of Chinese investment in Cameroon. Compensation to those displaced is not a given. Coulibaly again mentions the Malibya project where former land owners have been expropriated and seen their houses destroyed, without having received reparation or retraining for alternative work thus far. Those who keep their land face water shortages if the new enterprise uses this precious resource to excess or has reserved the right to preferential access. "In the Niger office zone in Mali, over 700,000 ha have been given to foreign investors whereas the total irrigation capacity is 1,000,000 ha", highlights Coulibaly. New farm owners are also unlikely to pay much attention to environmental issues. Having exhausted a plot's potential for profit, investors move on, leaving behind a desert and people whose future lies in the next big city's slums. "There is a risk of family and small-scale farming disappearing altogether" warns Coulibaly. With investors owning the most fertile lands equipped with machinery, infrastructure and irrigation systems, local farmers cannot compete equally, and have been mobilising to protest against the preferential treatment of foreign investors.

Are the countries of the Global South better off to heed the warnings of organisations such as CNOP and stay away from FDI in land? The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier de Schutter, said on his visit to Dublin in March, that investment in agriculture is vital, "But not all investments are similar. It's not the same thing to create large monocultures of soy to feed cattle than it is to provide cooperatives of small farmers with the mechanics, the storage facilities and the marketing facilities they need in order to increase their incomes. These are two very different types of investment and I think we need more of the latter and we probably could do without the former."

Coulibaly believes that the achievement of food sovereignty (the right of countries to be in control of their own food and agricultural systems) lies in small-scale family farming. This is also the stance of Via Campesina, an international network of over 150 farmers' organisations campaigning for food sovereignty. They hold that land reform is urgently needed to rebuild the peasant and family farm sectors, as opposed to producing food or agro-fuels for export. Robust agricultural laws tackling land property issues and infrastructural needs must be implemented. Consulting with farmers' organisations, Mali passed such a law in 2006. Had its implementation not been delayed, "land acquisition of such scope would not have been possible", claims Coulibaly.

It seems difficult to find a solution which sees the development of small-scale farming and land acquisition by foreign governments happening together. Devlin Kuyek, a researcher with GRAIN, an organisation supporting farmers' movements through information supply, asserts: "we need a food system that looks after people's needs. It's not good for countries to go out and secure their own food needs in countries suffering from hunger." FDIs in land might erode the social structure of huge parts of the world's population. Strong regulation needs to be put in place before the business of land gets out of hand.

*For more info see: [www.Grain.org](http://www.Grain.org) - [www.farmlandgrab.org](http://www.farmlandgrab.org) - [www.landcoalition.org](http://www.landcoalition.org) - [www.ecofair-trade.org](http://www.ecofair-trade.org) - [www.cnop-mali.org](http://www.cnop-mali.org) - [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org) - [www.ifad.org/pub/land/land\\_grab.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/pub/land/land_grab.pdf)*



The "security" wall - Christine de Vos

# Palestine at the Crossroads

*After a recent trip to the West Bank, Stephen McCloskey writes about the human rights situation of Palestinians.*

**I**n November 2009, an Irish delegation of 22 people visited the West Bank to assess the human rights situation for Palestinians living under occupation. Our programme included meetings with human rights activists and NGOs based in both Palestine and Israel. The recurring issues that surfaced in these discussions were the notorious security wall that is devouring Palestinian land, the expanding settlements that “create new facts on the ground”, the checkpoints that disrupt everyday life for Palestinians, and the arbitrary imprisonment of men, women and children.

## **Internment by another name**

Palestinians are mostly incarcerated under the legal guise of Administrative Detention, whereby detainees are held without charge or trial for a period of up to six months. The period of detention is frequently renewed and this process can continue indefinitely. This is internment by another name, the form of detention disastrously used by the British government in the north of Ireland in the 1970s. At the end of 2008, there were

700 administrative detainees in Israeli prisons. Addameer, a Palestinian NGO, believes that Israel has used this measure in a “highly arbitrary manner” that “leads to other, grave human rights violations, such as degrading and inhuman treatment and torture”.

These concerns are shared by B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights, which believes Israel has “made a charade out of the entire system of procedural safeguards in both domestic and international law regarding the right to liberty and due process”. B’Tselem is part of a growing level of dissent and activism within Israeli society challenging the human rights abuses related to the occupation.

## **Checkpoints**

This activism includes the courageous women of Machsom Watch who monitor Israeli military checkpoints for human rights abuses on a daily basis and post their reports on the internet ([www.machsomwatch.org](http://www.machsomwatch.org)). Our group met with a 64 year old woman activist from Machsom monitoring the Bethlehem checkpoint.



A checkpoint at Moskee Hebron - Christine de

She stands at checkpoints every day at 6am and 2pm keeping a careful eye on the treatment of Palestinians. The presence of these women can prevent serious abuses and shines a light on the daily grind and humiliation created by the checkpoints.

#### **Security Wall**

The traditional Israeli justification for its punitive judicial apparatus and network of checkpoints and barriers in the West Bank is “security”. This is also the rationale for the notorious security wall which is allegedly under construction to prevent attacks in Israeli territory. The wall is approximately 700km long (60 per cent completed) and up to eight metres high and has, on average, a 60 metre wide exclusion area. Around 1.5million trees were uprooted to clear a path for the wall, only 20 per cent of which runs along the recognised border, the Green Line.

If security was Israel’s primary reason for constructing the wall then it would adhere to the Green Line and ensure that the entire Palestinian population was on one side of the wall. In fact the wall deviates substantially from the Green Line to make major incursions into Palestinian land and annexes large tracts of fertile farming land. In 2004, the International Court of Justice gave an advisory opinion that the wall runs “contrary to international law” and should be removed.

#### **Settlements**

The checkpoints and security wall help to siphon off more and more Palestinian land for the construction of new Israeli settlements. There are 135 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and 450,000 settlers, with Palestinian-run areas amounting to just 17 per cent of the West Bank. Settlement construction means loss of homes and possessions, livelihoods and income for Palestinians.

We were given a tour of settlements in East Jerusalem by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHAD). The group estimates that 24,145 homes have been demolished in the Occupied Territories since 1967 and 4,247 alone destroyed in the Gaza Strip during Operation Cast Lead, Israel’s three week military bombardment in the winter of 2008-09 which killed 1,400 Gazans.

#### **Bil’in**

Non-violent resistance to the land annexations, house demolitions and security wall is evident across the West Bank, most notably in the small agricultural village of Bil’in, west of Ramallah, which has

had half of its land seized for the construction of a settlement. Since March 2005, the residents of Bil’in have organised direct actions to reclaim their land and the village has become an internationally recognised popular movement supported by large numbers of foreign nationals. Our group participated in a demonstration which coincided with the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. With the imagination and creativity that has characterised the Bil’in protests, the villagers created their own mock Berlin wall that contrasted the collapse and failure of one form of separation and division with the continued construction of another.

#### **Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions**

The villagers of Bil’in and Palestinians across the West Bank need our support to resist the expansion of settlements and ensure Israel’s meaningful participation in negotiations. We need to support implementation of a wide-ranging Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) strategy that will lead to financial institutions and companies shedding their investments in Israel. Nothing short of Israel’s isolation on the world stage through cultural, sporting and academic boycotts and economic pressure will lead to positive change in the Middle East.

The Irish delegation’s visit to the West Bank saw Palestine at a crossroads which could lead to another intifada or uprising in the absence of political hope, or the completion of the Zionist programme of eroding any possibility of a coherent Palestinian society. Alternatively, civil society and political movements around the world can mount sufficient international pressure on Israel to ensure that it become a serious participant in negotiations worth their name.

*If you are interested in visiting the West Bank as part of a delegation of human rights activists then please contact [westbank@eircom.net](mailto:westbank@eircom.net) Visits are organised twice a year and are not aligned to any political or civil society organisation.*

*For further information on how to get involved in BDS visit the web site of the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, [www.ipsc.ie](http://www.ipsc.ie) or the Global BDS Movement, [www.bdsmovement.net](http://www.bdsmovement.net)*

*Stephen McCloskey is the Director of the Centre for Global Education but is writing in an individual capacity. The views expressed in this article are those of the author only.*

# Congo's Conflict Minerals

*Stephen Kelly looks at how we all contribute to bloody violence.*



*Mining for Coltan in the Kivus, Eastern Congo - Stephen Kelly*

**H**iding behind a crumbling wall of her family home, Fatuma crouches low so as not to be seen by the group of strangers moving past the banana tree she had been playing under only 30 minutes ago. In that time, much has changed in her life. There had been a lot of gunfire in the last few minutes, a sound people in the area have frequently heard since the late 1990's when a brutal war began in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The last Fatuma saw of her mother was when she was dragged off crying in the middle of the night by men in military fatigues last year. Rape is endemic in Eastern DRC and is used to instil fear in communities in the mineral-rich areas.

Fatuma's father was not at home at the time. He was mining coltan in an open-cast mine operated by one of the militia groups in North Kivu and would be away from home for weeks on end. Being more aware of what would happen to their mother if the men took her, Fatuma's older brother pleaded with the soldiers to stop. He was shot in the head. She fears the same thing has happened

to her father who now lies motionless, face down and by the door of the house.

With no family left and at 8 years old, Fatuma has a very uncertain, lonely and dangerous path ahead of her.

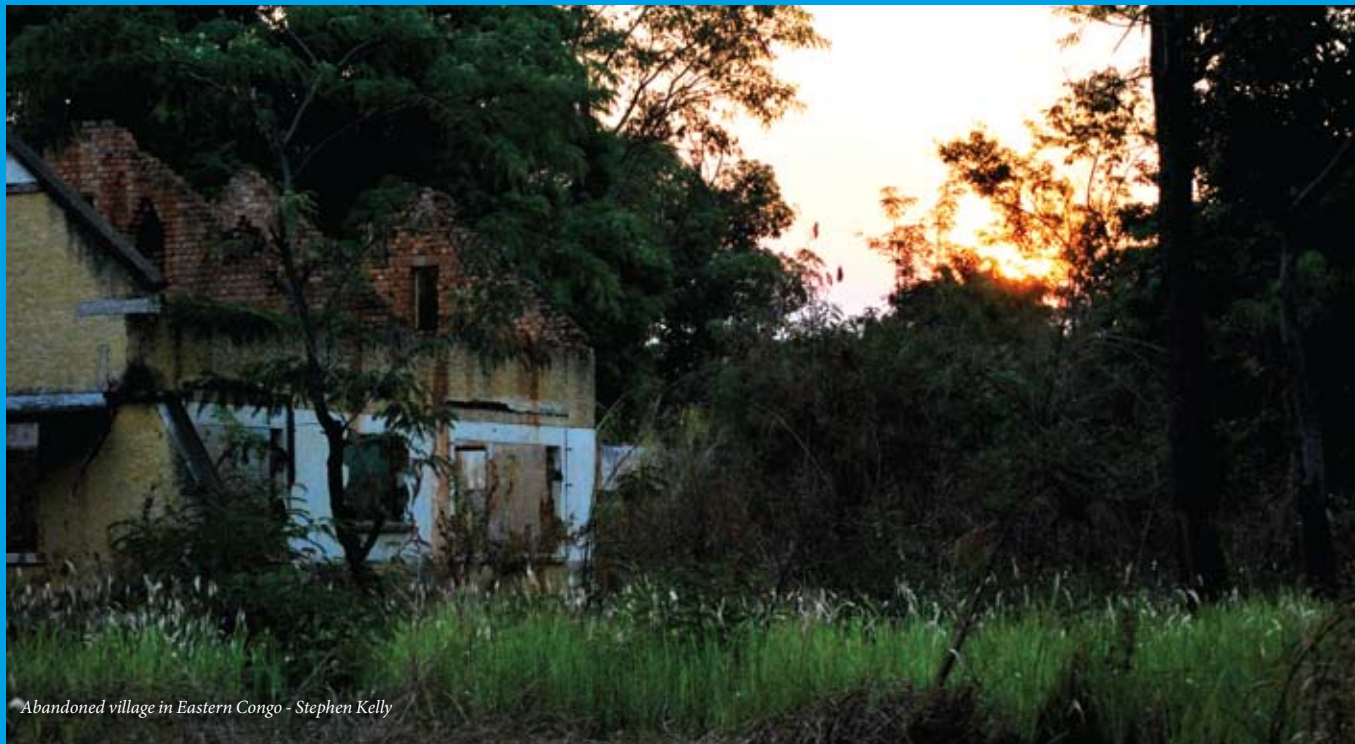
Almost 6 million people have died of war related causes since 1997 in the Congo. 80 per cent of the world's coltan (short for columbite tantalite) reserves are in the DRC, where militias fight for control of coltan mines. The militias then sell the minerals to middle-men who transport them out of the country – often illegally (mostly to Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, although other states have also been implicated) where they are shipped to refineries worldwide. From these refineries, the finished product is sold to large electronics companies which are household brands within Europe and North America.

Coltan is refined to make tantalum which is used in mobile phones, laptops and digital cameras. A United Nations group of experts report in 2009 confirmed the widespread presence of armed groups in Eastern DRC using illicit mineral trade in coltan, cassiterite (refined into tin), wolframite

and gold to fund their violent activities.

In your pocket or within 5 feet of you lie minerals from the DRC. It would be naïve to think that the minerals used in these electronic devices come from legitimate sources and not from a mine where violence, intimidation and gross human rights violations are perpetrated on a daily basis against the most vulnerable.

It is irresponsible, short-sighted and harmful to the Congolese for leading mobile phone companies in Ireland to promise customers a new mobile phone every 6 months. It also indirectly garnishes the militias controlling the mines with weapons to continue their reign of terror. A UN report confirms that the world's fifth largest tin-processing company, Thailand Smelting and Refining Co (Thaisarco), buys ore from an exporter who is supplied by mines controlled by the Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Rwanda (FDLR). The FDLR is one of the main militia groups terrorizing local communities in Eastern DRC. Thaisarco is owned by British metals giant Amalgamated Metal Corporation (AMC) Group. Many other companies are named in the UN Group of Experts Report 2009.



*Abandoned village in Eastern Congo - Stephen Kelly*

The answer is not that companies should wash their hands of these issues and avoid purchasing minerals from the DRC. What is needed is for multinationals to take responsibility for their actions and commit to creating transparent supply chains for the benefit of all.

According to Jean-Louis Bondoko, of Equitable Action, an Irish organization campaigning to raise awareness about the plight of those in the DRC affected by the conflict mineral trade, “It is imperative that the multinationals and politicians named in reports are investigated fully for their involvement in this deadly industry as well as taking responsibility for their actions.”

Following the primary thread from the effects to the cause is not easy, but a number of urgent measures are required to stop fuelling this dangerous and uncontrollable inferno. Firstly, regional governments should engage actively with militias – a lack of political and democratic space in some neighbouring states (especially Rwanda) is crippling negotiations that would ensure rebels can return home. Politics, and not simply a military solution, can help contribute to ending violence.

Secondly, as highlighted by Sophia Pickles of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group for the Great Lakes Region of Africa, “security sector reform must be prioritized across Congolese institutions – including the army, police, judiciary and border controls”. Broadly speaking the national army (FARDC) needs to be better controlled, coordinated and managed. The FARDC have perpetrated some of the worst atrocities

against local populations and often people fear the FARDC as much as the militias.

Thirdly, Western multinationals can no longer weed out every last pound of flesh from developing countries. Companies need to start paying fair prices for products coming from the developing world and ensuring these are transferred right down the supply chain to those at the bottom who spend long days toiling in dangerous, unregulated mines for \$2 USD per day. Formal channels with regulatory legislation focussing on a visible and transparent trade system must be developed with fairer prices providing the incentives to follow and sustain the new process.

The practical implementation of a transparent supply chain will be difficult given the lack of infrastructure, remote locations of the mines and general insecurity. Proper certification requires honest, impartial and unbiased personnel to establish and operate such a system. The longer multinational companies and their subsidiaries continue to feed money through to these militias via obscure and illegitimate channels, the more regional insecurities will deteriorate. As advocated by UK Parliamentarian, Chris Mullen MP, mining companies need to fully disclose payments to the Congolese government to stifle the rampant corruption that has blighted the country causing untold suffering to the Congolese people for so long. It is imperative that multinational companies trading in minerals from eastern DRC ensure that minerals they buy neither finance armed groups or military units, nor contribute to human rights abuses

at any point along the supply chain.

So what can you do? Our government needs to put pressure on companies who knowingly sell such electronic products with minerals that haven't been validated through a transparent supply chain to avoid benefiting the warring parties in eastern DRC. There are already campaigns in progress to raise awareness about this issue both in Ireland and worldwide (see list below).

If the status quo continues, more children like Fatuma will experience the living hell that is part of Eastern Congo today. We cannot continue contributing to this tragedy by purchasing electronics goods blindly without demanding that the goods we buy are manufactured with materials sourced from reputable mines. We must use our power as consumers to advocate for change. What is needed is a transparent system that develops stronger governance and economic institutions, in turn reducing exploitation by illegal armed groups and promoting local and regional development. We all have a part to play in changing the lives of those suffering in the Congo. Don't wait... tomorrow may be too late for Fatuma.

***Irish-based Campaigns***

*<http://www.equitableaction.com/>*

***Global Campaigns***

*<http://www.congonow.org/>*

*[http://www.raisehopeforcongo.org/casualties\\_conflict\\_minerals](http://www.raisehopeforcongo.org/casualties_conflict_minerals)*

***Other Links***

*<http://www.appggreatlakes.org/>*

# Copenhagen: Economics meets Climate Change

*Tony Philips, who lives and works in Argentina, writes of the failure to negotiate a global deal on climate change at the Copenhagen conference*

**P**rofessional economists are practitioners of a social science. They like to regard themselves on a par with practitioners of natural sciences such as Geology or Meteorology.

In December 2009, at the Copenhagen COP-15 conference economic interests clashed with the facts presented by the natural scientists. The politicians ignored the natural scientists and instead allowed the economists and financiers to suggest further financial and economic solutions to a problem that is part of the economic system itself.

## Economics meets Climate Change

For decades the world's best meteorologists have been working together in the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC]. For this crucial work they received the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize along with former US vice-president Al Gore. Since 1990 the IPCC reports have used the natural sciences to inform politicians of alarming chemical and temperature changes in the planet's atmosphere. They inform us that these changes continue to occur at an accelerating rate and that they are a direct result of economic activity.

The IPCC suggest that other natural scientists, the geologists, should stop finding and extracting fossil fuels from the planet because the burning of coal and oil and their use in industrial agriculture are the main sources of greenhouse gasses. The economists disagree.

## Infinite Growth, Finite Planet

Economists stick to their mantra informing politicians that their economies depend on GDP growth. As Edward Abbey charges in his book *The Journey Home: The global economy operates on "the ideology of the cancer cell," "growth for the sake of growth"*.

In *The Art of the Commonplace*, author and ecologist Wendell Berry states "The aims of [...] limitless growth, limitless wealth, limitless power, limitless mechanization and automation, [...] can enrich and empower the few (for a while), but they will sooner or later ruin us all." As it turns out those ruinous consequences have come sooner rather than later.

Copenhagen was a Mexican standoff between economists and natural scientists. Accustomed to listening to their economists, and knowing that these economists represent powerful economic interests, politicians chose to ignore the meteorologists and to continue trying to impose a 'solution' that does not work.

The result was a shambles. Two thousand people were arrested in the

streets. A huge opportunity was lost. In the Bella Centre negotiating halls four nations (Tuvalu, Venezuela, Bolivia and Sudan) spoke out against the so called Copenhagen 'accord'. In the consensus rules of the United Nations this means, in effect, that it is a non-accord.

*In December 2009, at the Copenhagen conference, economic interests clashed with the facts presented by the natural scientists*

## In Bolivia Mother Nature is called 'Pachamama'

The Bolivian president, Evo Morales Ayma, not only refused to accept the "accord", he offered an alternative. Morales called on the social movements of the world to come to the Bolivian city of Cochabamba in April 2010 to discuss climate change in an open social forum and explore some alternatives to the solutions espoused in Copenhagen.

Cochabamba offers three innovations which were not present in Copenhagen. They are:

- legal rights for Mother Earth/Pachamama (similar to the UN declaration of Human Rights); implying changes in the notion of land ownership making it more like land stewardship
- direct critique of structural problems with the current economic system incorporating an explicit critique of capitalism
- a forum for indigenous movements to share their thoughts and practices which have been successful for centuries in protecting their land from the kinds of processes which are currently responsible for climate change.

You can follow what's been happening in Cochabamba. For more information on the "World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth", see the website - <http://pwccc.wordpress.com/> The Conference is open to global participation and welcomes the participation of World social groups.

*The writer is one of an active delegation of ecologists who travelled from Argentina to Cochabamba this April. For information on the Argentine participation see: <http://www.cochabamba.org.ar/>*

# Copenhagen Blogroll Bites

*Justin Frewen*



*Climate change related street art in Copenhagen - Tony Philips*

**A**s we struggled through the global economic crisis and the bitterly cold, short winter days, the December 2009 UN Climate Change Conference was held up as an opportunity to at least leave our world in a reasonable condition for future generations. While the Conference was widely seen as having failed, what was the assessment of participating climate change activists? The immediacy of their hopes, aspirations, frustrations and disappointments as well as their reflective assessment is eloquently captured in their blogs. Three such blogs were hosted by Trócaire, Friends of the Earth and the Irish Youth Delegate.

Due to a lottery system, Senan Gardiner, the COP15 Youth delegate for Ireland was unable to enter the Bella Centre for two days. He therefore concentrated on raising awareness of the realities and consequences of climate change.

So today (Friday) I decided I was going to get properly immersed in the youth climate movement, particularly since once again I wasn't allowed inside the Bella Centre (the number of youth inside was something silly like 12)... So outside at 10am we all shaved our heads in climate shame... I'm so cold!!!! Did I mention that it was around -5 degrees and snowing? Not a pleasant way to cut your hair. On the plus side I was interviewed by the national Swedish news and a web-newscaster... After that was speech writing and then a candle-lit sermon spelling climate shame this was great...

For Niamh Garvey of Trócaire, attendance in the Bella Centre could be disheartening as the speeches promised little:

**It is tense in the Bella centre. Heads of State arrived, and a series of speeches were made, including a bitterly disappointing one**

**by US President Obama, who didn't inspire a single positive comment from anyone I spoke to. While Brazil's President Lula inspired by announcing new commitments to finance their own emission reductions as well as provide support for other developing countries, President Obama's speech took a more defensive tone. Rumours abound, from the ever popular 'when do you think we'll get to go home - today? Tonight? 4am? Tomorrow afternoon?' To whether in fact a deal can be done at all. Spirits are certainly low, and information is difficult to come by, since discussions are happening at the very highest levels.**

Reflecting on the conference in her Friends of the Earth blog, Molly Walsh, despite her disillusionment with the conference's outcomes, still found grounds for hope:

**Copenhagen was personally very disappointing for me. I did not expect there to be a final legally binding treaty agreed there but I had hoped for better things. I had hoped that perhaps movement would be made on sticky issues in the negotiating texts and that by the time things came to a close there would be maybe three or four areas that still needed to be worked through in 2010... We cannot allow our negotiators and politicians to fail us again. They have a second chance in Mexico... The best contribution that our small country can make to ensuring a successful binding agreement in Mexico is to get our own house in order. At 17 tonnes per capita we are not exactly a world leader on climate change, but all that might just be about to change.**

To read Niamh's blog see - <http://www.trocaire.org/whatwedo/trocaire-blogs/93>

To read Senan's blog see - <http://senanyouth.wordpress.com/>

To read Molly's blog see - <http://www.foe.ie/blog/>

# Global Justice For A New Decade

## *Comhlámh AGM and Development Forum*

This year Comhlámh's AGM and development forum will provide a space to learn about and discuss global justice issues, including a panel discussion, a keynote speech from Mary Robinson on Climate Justice, and workshop discussions on Food Justice, Trade Justice and Health Justice.

**Date:** 15 May 2010

**Venue:** Chartered Accountants House,  
47 - 49 Pearse Street, Dublin 2:

**Contact:** admin@comhlamh.org or call 01 4783490

# 35th Anniversary Party

*15th May 2010*

We invite you to celebrate with us 35 years of Solidarity, Education and Activism For Global Justice With Comhlámh, Afri and Kimmage Development Studies Centre

**Saturday 15th May 2010**

**Wynn's Hotel**  
**8 till late**

**Admission Free; a night of music, reminiscing and surprises**

# Coming Home Weekend

*21-23 May, Cork*

Calling all returned development workers and volunteers to join us for our forthcoming Coming Home Weekend. The weekend is a great opportunity to reflect on your time overseas, share stories and tips on the returning home process with other returnees, meet likeminded people and to think about your future plans. They are also always great fun and very sociable. The entire weekend, including all meals and accommodation, costs €50.

*For more information please contact [stuart@comhlamh.org](mailto:stuart@comhlamh.org)*

# EU Trade Policy and Developing Countries

In March this year Comhlámh, along with many European NGOs, attended a Trade Commission Conference on 'EU Trade Policy towards Developing Countries' in Brussels. While most of the speakers at the conference agreed that free trade and continued liberalisation would be good for developing countries, many voices from civil society, and from the countries affected by the EU's trade policy, dissented. They expressed concern that EU trade policy was anti-development and could make developing countries poorer. Some 'interesting people' also held a protest outside the building, raising their concerns that EU trade policy was bad for women's rights, human rights, labour rights, indigenous communities and farmers.

*To read more about the conference, see here - <http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/press/index.cfm?id=512>*

*To read more about the concerns of civil society and EU trade justice groups, and see pictures of the protest, see here - <http://www.corporateeurope.org/global-europe/news/2010/03/16/eu-dog-savages-poor-say-protesters>*

# Mass Lobby Day to Stop Climate Chaos

*2nd June*

Stop Climate Chaos are holding a mass lobby on Wednesday the 2nd of June in Buswells Hotel (across the road from the Dail).

The UN summit in Copenhagen failed to secure an international agreement on climate change. The attempt to agree a binding treaty on climate change has now been postponed until this December when negotiators will meet in Mexico.

Come and be part of a national event to tell your TD that climate is too important for politics as usual.

<http://www.stopclimatechaos.ie/takeaction/>

# Skills in Development

*Education Clinic on May 29th*

Putting the learning into practice raises new questions and inspires new ideas. If you have attended training in development education then consider coming along to this one day clinic. For more information see - [www.comhlamh.org/developmenteducation](http://www.comhlamh.org/developmenteducation).

**Date:** 10 - 4pm, May 29th 2010

**Venue:** Irish Aid Volunteering and Information centre,  
27-31 Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin 2

**Cost:** €20 for non-members, €15 for Comhlámh members, €10 concession rate. Price includes lunch and resources will be provided.

**Contact:** Ali Leahy, call 01 4783490, email [ali@comhlamh.org](mailto:ali@comhlamh.org)

# Teachers' Summer Course

Exploring Diversity & Global Citizenship through the Arts

**Dates:** Monday 5th - Friday 9th July 2010

Refreshments and resources will be provided

**Venue:** Red Cow Moran Hotel, Naas Road, Dublin 22

**Contact:** [Ali@comhlamh.org](mailto:Ali@comhlamh.org)

or call 01 4783490 or visit [www.comhlamh.org](http://www.comhlamh.org)



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