

THE SOUTH CENTRE

by Julius K. Nyerere

The following is the text of the Address given by the late Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, first Chairman of the South Centre, at the Opening Ceremony of the 1st Meeting of the Council of Representatives, 18th September 1995, Geneva. It was thought useful to publish this address in the current issue of South Letter because of its particular relevance to the various deliberations following the Havana Summit of the South concerning the institutional framework for the implementation of the Summit's Plan of Action and also because of its pertinence to other discussions regarding the nature, functions, structure and financing of the South Centre.

The background to our presence here today is known to you all. The South Commission published its final Report in 1990, and before dissolving itself decided that a small office should be set up for two years to disseminate its recommendations and to promote their implementation. But by the time the Commission Members met again in 1992 to wind up the South Centre, the Centre had become useful to many South institutions and countries. They had found it helpful as a source of intellectually sound policy analyses directed at People-Centred development, and the development of a collective platform

for the South, and they had been sending messages opposing its closure

I was therefore asked by the former members of the South Commission to undertake further consultations, and if these were favourable to find some way of converting the South Centre into a permanent institution. Wide consultations were carried out; the consensus was that a permanent South Centre could greatly help South countries in their quest for solidarity and co-operation with one another, and in their endeavours to build people-centred development in freedom.

Organising the Centre on a permanent basis has taken longer than originally expected. Even now it has been made possible only because of the commitment of a very small staff at the Centre, the co-operation which has been received from the Swiss and the active support of a small number of South countries -- in particular the current Chair-country of the Non-Aligned Movement, Indonesia.

The new, Intergovernmental South Centre which we are inaugurating today is NOT the Secretariat of the South which was so strongly recommended in the South Commission's final Report -- *The Challenge to the South*. It is a Centre which organizes and coordinates up to date analyses -- by the South and for the South -- of

new or specific (international and national) development issues. In other words, the South Centre is a small 'Think Tank' of the South. Its work is based on the belief that the countries of the South can co-operate, or act together, more effectively when they have access to greater and shared knowledge and understanding of major international questions, and of the implications of these questions for the freedom and development of our countries.

The conclusions of the South Commission remain valid and form the base for the work of the South Centre. But the world has changed since 1990 and is still changing very rapidly. The Cold War has come to an end; there is one Super-Power Bloc, not two. The mass, and the reach, of new scientific and technological developments is expanding at a terrifying pace; the economic, political, military, and social units which have the knowledge, skills, and capital necessary to exploit these developments have new and far reaching power over those who lack these assets. And the fundamental implications of the final Agreement on the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations for developing countries are as yet imperfectly realised.

No country, and no part of any country, can escape the effects of these recent and continuing changes. We in the South must try to understand what they are, and what

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government, or any South institution.

This description of what the South Centre is NOT, means that if the Centre is to be valuable to the South, its work has to be used by the peoples, governments and institutions of the South. An instrument becomes useful only by being used! We hope that the Centre's information and analysis will be studied, and its recommendations seriously considered as a basis for possible action.

The need is there. Our countries face an international environment, and a world economy, dominated by the strong developed nations of the North, and with international institutions to a considerable extent shaped on the basis of the North's values and interests. It is an understatement to say that often the values, aspirations, and interests of the South -- and especially the smaller countries of the South -- are ignored as if they were unimportant.

The South Centre's existence is based on the belief that developing countries can have strength -- when they act together, in co-operation and with a coordinated effort. We do not have to be ignored. We are too many to be ignored. But as Rajiv Gandhi once said: if the South wants to count, the South must stand up and be counted.

Thus, the Centre has a positive function of encouraging, promoting, and facilitating the South's collective action. We prepare and make our analyses of issues available to all countries of the South; we also hope to help the

different Chapters of the Group of 77, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the South's other collective instruments, to be more effective in serving the needs and policy decisions of South countries. And we shall endeavour to continue to co-operate with global institutions of the United Nations so as to promote "the economic and social advancement of all peoples". At the same time, we shall continue to advocate the reform of international institutions as and when this seems necessary to achieve that declared purpose.

I have spoken of what the Centre has been trying to do, and will try to do. I have explained what it is not, and what it hopes to be. But the ability, and the capacity, of the South Centre will depend in the future as in the past on the support it receives from the countries of the South. At present we have an undeservedly good reputation, because people are kind and appreciate even the little help we have been able to offer. But my colleagues and I are very conscious of the things we have not done which ought to have been done, and in particular which it would have been useful to do.

We are, and we wish to continue to be, a small institution which co-operates with other research and development institutions of the South, and which organizes and coordinates co-operative work by South experts on important issues of current or future relevance to development. Even so, the size of our present staff is absurdly small; some increase will have to be made if the Centre is to be more effective.

From all that I have said, I think it is clear that the future work of the Centre, indeed its continued existence as a useful body, requires political, diplomatic, and intellectual support from the South governments and from non-governmental organizations. Unfortunately it also means that the Centre requires financial support from the South. We need this from governments, from public and private business, and from other financial organizations of the South.

If the South Centre is to continue to be a service institution of the South it must be the South's institution in all senses. Assistance from friends in the North will, of course, be helpful. But the South Centre must continue to be an instrument of the South or it will be nothing.

The Centre is now an Inter-governmental Organization of the South. But in accordance with the Agreement it will still seek to serve all the people and every people-centred organization of the South. And its value to them all, in the future as in the past, will lie in its intellectual autonomy and independence. Only in those circumstances will it be able to continue to do the work I have outlined, and with which our past activities have made you familiar. We need your support in order to serve the South.

Friends: As I thank the governments, institutions, and individuals of the South -- and the North -- for their past help and co-operation with the South Centre, I ask for your continued and expanded support in all areas. ■

they mean to our development options. We need to know about the opportunities they present, and their dangers to our development ambitions. And insofar as there is a need for global action to channel the changes towards the service of all mankind, it is imperative that the South understands its own needs as distinct from the needs and desires of richer and more developed countries.

Having understood, the South countries need to be in a position to act together to maximise the South's benefit from such negotiations or international decisions. The task of the South Centre, within the capacity given to it by the South, will be to provide a common position for consideration. It will be expressed in a Paper which gives information and analysis of the major new issues, or evolving issues, and which also recommends to the countries and organizations of the South what actions they could usefully consider taking, separately or together.

It is needless to say that identifying and articulating a common interest of the countries of the South is not the same thing as seeking confrontation with the countries of the North. The existence of distinct groups of countries as represented by the OECD on the one hand, and the Group of 77 and China on the other, is an expression of a reality: the imbalance in the level of development, and therefore an imbalance of power, in the world.

This imbalance of power in the world imposes an obligation on all of us to continue the endeavour to reduce it. But it does not necessarily imply a confrontation between the

developed countries of the North and the developing countries of the South. Numerous leaders of the South have made clear over and over again that the governments and peoples of the developing countries do not desire confrontation and hostility between South and North. On the contrary, the South recognises that all the countries of the world are interdependent; we affect each other by almost all our actions. Actions of the rich and powerful have a greater effect on others than do events in poor and weak countries. That is the meaning of the imbalance of power. But even the poorest or smallest of us affect others by what we do or fail to do. North-South cooperation is needed, not North-South confrontation.

The different degree of interdependence has always existed. But now, with the speed and nature of modern communications, the effects of external developments or decisions can be very quick -- and very great -- regardless of distances or different circumstances. For the weak these effects can sometimes be catastrophic. We in the South must be able and ready at any time to speak for, and sometimes to defend, our own interests as changes take place or are threatened.

Doing this is not a confrontation. It is the normal process of negotiation between groups with different interests. And it is in the interests of all people -- North as well as South. For in real terms world progress can only take place on the basis of human equality, and national equality; change will only be beneficial to world peace and betterment when respect is accorded to all by all, and when justice is

available to all. Neither peace nor development can be based upon the oppressions of might, whether this be economic, scientific, political, or military might. Nor can world peace and progress be based upon the implied acquiescence of silence on the part of those whose interests have been ignored or over-ridden, but who feel too vulnerable themselves to argue or even to protest. All governments sometimes find it helpful to have someone who can say what they would like to say, but from whose words they can, under pressure, disassociate themselves if necessary. The Centre will sometimes say such things!

And just as the South Centre is not a Secretariat of the South, nor is it a political body which will sit in judgement on the actions of South countries, or on disputes between South countries. Our concerns relate to the economic, social, and cultural questions which underlie and affect the peace and development of our countries and all their peoples.

Nor is the South Centre an executive body of any kind. To the best of its ability it will objectively analyse international or regional issues relevant to people-centred development of the South and its peoples. As appropriate, it will make recommendations concerning possible action by the South. But it will be for the governments and peoples to determine what action they wish to take and can take. The Centre's documents and papers will be independent and realistic; they will try to express the development interests of the South and to urge certain approaches to development problems. But they will not constitute a 'Policy Paper' for any South

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