

The Centrality of Science to Development and Sovereignty

The G77 Havana Summit

by Cynthia R. Rush

Sept. 23—The Summit of the G77 + China, held in Havana, Cuba Sept. 15–16, was the most recent in the sequence of summits held over the past two months which have given voice to the nations of the Global Majority that are forging a new world economic order and demanding the creation of an international financial architecture to guarantee their sovereign economic and scientific development.

Following the July 27–28 Russia-Africa Forum in St. Petersburg and the Aug. 22–24 BRICS-Plus in Johannesburg, the G77 met under the banner, “Current Challenges to Development: The Role of Science, Technology and Innovation in Development,” bringing together 1,300 participants from 116 out of 134 member countries, including 31 heads of state and government and 100 country delegations. Immediately after the summit, many of the delegates left for New York City to participate in the General Debate at the UN General Assembly, to continue to demand an end to the old unjust, neocolonial world order.

The theme of the summit was especially appropriate. The international financial system, now in its death throes, decreed decades ago that developing nations would be denied access to science and technology as a deliberate Malthusian policy which relegated them to the status of deindustrialized raw materials producers or, at best, allowed them access only to low energy-flux dense forms of “green” energy and “renew-



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The summit of the G77 + China is the latest in a sequence of summits that has given voice to the nations of the Global Majority for a new world order. Havana, Sept. 15-16, 2023.

ables” which perpetuate poverty and underdevelopment.

Cuba’s experience has been particularly horrific, due to the 61-year-long economic blockade imposed on it by the United States beginning in February of 1962 and intensified in recent years under a brutal sanctions

regime intended, as former murderous Secretary of State Mike Pompeo put it in early 2021, to “strangle” the island’s economy and deny it all access to science and technology and anything else—food, medicine, energy—that would improve the lives of the Cuban people, in hopes of bringing about regime-change. **Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel**, Chair of G77 for 2023, reported that the U.S. has gone so far as to block Cubans’ access to internet sites containing any scientific research or related data.

It is only through what he described as “an iron political will” and great sacrifice, that Cuba has



UN/Cia Pak

Miguel Díaz-Canel y Bermúdez, President of Cuba and host of the Summit.

succeeded over the past 60 years in developing a world class biotechnology industry and scientific capabilities that have protected the Cuban people and earned international respect for its willingness to share its knowledge and assist other developing countries. Díaz-Canel noted in his opening speech that the summit occurs at a time when “humanity has attained a scientific and technological potential unimaginable just a few decades ago, with an extraordinary ability to produce wealth and well-being which, under conditions of greater equality and justice, could guarantee dignified, comfortable, and sustainable living standards for almost all the planet’s inhabitants.”

Although he apologized for the “austere” character of the summit due to the effects of the blockade and noted the “humanitarian toll” it has taken on the population, he proudly directed the group’s attention to a wonderful exhibit set up in the foyer to the Havana Convention Hall depicting Cuba’s impressive scientific achievements over the past sixty years.

The G77: ‘We Are Many, and We Shall Win’

The G77 was founded in 1964, at that time with 77 member nations. As President Díaz-Canel noted, today the G77 + China “has the immense responsibility of representing on the international stage the interests of the majority of the nations on the planet.” While the group maintains its original name, it now has 134 member states in which 80% of the world’s population resides, more than two-thirds of the membership of the United Nations. While China is not an official member, it provides some financial aid to the group and supports it politically. Hence the name G77 + China. In honoring those who “believed in and founded” the G77, “and in the name of the nations we represent,” the Cuban President called on member nations “to respect their voices and demands! We are many! And we shall win!”

Li Xi, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC), attended the summit as a special envoy of President Xi Jinping. In his [remarks](#) to the group, he emphasized that the world “is undergoing changes on a scale unseen in a century. Developing countries are becoming stronger. A significant shift is taking place in the international balance of power.” Noting that a new revolution in science, technology and industry is well underway, he stressed that the “G77 and China, as the



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Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, President of Brazil.

mainstay of South-South cooperation, work in synergy to revitalize the global development partnership and strengthen coordination on macro policies.”

The heads of state and government who attended came from across the globe—Ibero-America and the Caribbean, Africa, Southwest Asia, Central Asia, and Asia. Speaker after speaker referenced the “epochal” changes taking place in the world, and the enormous challenges developing nations face to ensure that the “the comprehensive reform of the international financial architecture and a more inclusive and coordinated approach to global finance governance,” called for in the final [Havana Declaration](#), comes into being.

Many pointed to the complex international situation, rife with geopolitical tensions, dangerous conflicts, and economic crises which, they said, will require close collaboration and solidarity “and not letting ourselves be divided,” as **Brazil’s President Lula da Silva** put it. He reported that since becoming President on Jan. 1 of this year, he had participated in many summits with developing countries—the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the BRICS and the G20. “But none of these have the range and diversity of the G77.” The G77 was “fundamental in exposing the anomalies of global trade and in defending the building of a new international economic order.” Unfortunately, he said, “many of our demands were never met.”

Today, he said, the nations of the South possess all the necessary prerequisites “to become the vanguard in science, technology, and innovation,” and recalled Brazil’s pioneering role in the 1980s in promoting South-South cooperation in the areas of science, technology, and innovation when it established a partnership with Argentina on nuclear energy, and space cooperation



Dr. Naledi Pandor, South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation.

with China. What needs to be changed is the “asymmetrical” system of world governance, because the UN, the Bretton Woods System, and the World Trade Organization “have lost credibility.” He announced that when Brazil assumes the presidency of the G20 later this year, he will propose the creation of a Working Group on Science, Technology, and Innovation to advance the interests of developing countries in this area.

Without exception, every speaker denounced the unilateral U.S. blockade of Cuba, a sentiment also expressed in the final declaration. Lula called it “illegal” and demanded that the U.S. also withdraw its designation of Cuba as a “state sponsor of terrorism.” **South Africa's Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr. Naledi Pandor**, referred to it as “cruel, inhumane, and unilateral,” which must be ended “by our G77 activism.”

It was perhaps with special sadistic malice that on Sept. 14, one day prior to the start of the summit, U.S. President Joe Biden issued a statement announcing the extension of the blockade for another year, until Sept. 14, 2024! In a Sept. 13 memorandum, directed to the Secretary of State and Secretary of the Treasury, Biden baldly lied that the continued economic strangulation of Cuba, which occurs under the auspices of the Trading with the Enemy Act, “is in the national interest of the United States.”

The Right ‘To Exist as a Species’

At the Summit's opening session, President Díaz-Canel shared the podium with **UN Secretary-General António Guterres**, whose remarks focused on the need to “fight for a world that works for all.... I count on your Group, who have long been champions of multi-

lateralism, to step up, to use your power and fight.” It's necessary, he asserted, to “champion a system ... that delivers for all humanity and not only for the privileged.” The world is “failing” developing nations. The reality, he said, is that current institutions, such as the UN Security Council, the IMF, and World Bank, were established in a past era “when many developing countries were shackled by colonial rule and had no say in their own affairs.” Now, there are “real opportunities to reshape the international system and international institutions to make them reflect today's realities instead of the realities that existed after the Second World War.”

But it was Díaz-Canel's opening speech that really set the tone for the two days of intense debate and valuable contributions made by tens of speakers. “The South's duty is to change the rules of the game,” he told participants. “Let's revitalize that spirit of battle, traditional knowledge, creative thought, and collective wisdom. Let us fight for our right to develop which is also our right to exist as a species.”

The “democratization of the system of international relations is still pending,” he warned, because the rules that govern international economic relations are “anachronistic and unfair.” The world is “in the midst of the greatest scientific-technological revolution humanity has known,” yet far from helping to “close the development gap and contribute to overcoming the injustice that threatens the very future of humanity,” he continued, this revolution has tended “to widen the gap, bend the will of many governments and protect the system of exploitation and looting which for centuries has increased the wealth of the old colonial powers and relegated our nations to a subservient role.” Thus, “the world has regressed three decades in terms of reduction of extreme poverty and is registering levels of hunger not seen since 2005.”

Consider, he said, the 84 million children who don't attend school or 600 million people without electricity; only 36% of the populations of developing nations have internet access, and an estimated 8 million people in developing nations die prematurely from diseases or infections that are preventable or treatable.

‘Tear Down the Barriers!’

The Cuban President explained that he had made the role of science, technology, and innovation the theme of the G77 summit because he was convinced that ad-



In spite of 61 years of economic blockade imposed by the U.S., Cuba has managed to develop a world-class medical system. Here, Cuban doctors are vaccinating displaced Haitians as part of a UN mission at a camp in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

vances in those areas will ultimately determine whether the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals—health and welfare, quality education, zero hunger, clean water and sanitation, economic growth, and industrialization—adopted by all member countries in 2015, can be achieved. “It’s obvious,” he said, “that the transformative process toward achieving those goals, in one way or another, contemplates the role of knowledge as a generator of science, technology, and innovation.” Now, “it’s time to tear down those international barriers that have prevented developing countries from accessing knowledge.... I speak of barriers intimately associated with an unjust and unsustainable international economic order which relegates the majority of humanity to conditions of underdevelopment.”

Those barriers include the privatization of science, through a patent process that benefits large multinational corporations and developed countries; the monopolies on vaccine production which deprived developing countries of desperately needed vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a deliberate “theft” of professionals trained with great effort and scarce resources in developing countries who are then lured away by developed countries with no regard for the social sacrifice made in educating and training them to make contributions to their own nations.

In a theme he would repeat at the UN General Assembly debate Sept. 20, Díaz-Canel warned that the “research paradigm which is limited to the cultural en-

vironment and perspectives of the North deprives the international scientific community of considerable intellectual capital.” Even weighed down by its enormous economic difficulties, Cuba has “scientific capabilities that should not be underestimated,” he said.

The current financial architecture which creates such inequities and forces the nations of the South to use their scarce financial resources to protect themselves from the instability which the system itself creates is “undoubtedly, an architecture hostile to the progress of our nations. It should be demolished if we really aspire to cultivate the development of the great mass of nations gathered here,” the Cuban President continued. The challenge to developing nations, he said, is “the urgency of re-

viving the confidence in the most dynamic element of our societies—the human being and his creative activity.” He invited participants “to discuss here the challenges to the development of our nations, of the injustices which separate us from global progress, but also the value of our unity and of our great wealth of knowledge. Let’s show the value and expertise of the South in the face of those who try to present us as an amorphous mass in search of charity or handouts.”

The North Won’t Be Pleased

In an insightful response to the Cuban President’s invitation, **South Africa’s Dr. Naledi Pandor** welcomed as “very relevant and appropriate for these challenging times” the theme chosen by Cuba for the conference. “A focus on science, technology, innovation, and digital access responds to the demands of the current times and our delegation hopes we as the South will agree to intensify our investment in RDI [Research, Development, and Innovation] so they play a leading role in our future development.” This important theme has been initiated at an “historic inflection point,” she said, “in which all of us are grappling for effective solutions. The struggle for the soul of the South and for unilateral global dominance has never been more intense, and as the South, we must seize this historic moment to ensure we develop the ability to be free agents of a development agenda that will advance our battle against poverty, inequality, and unemployment.”

Science, technology, and innovation are “strategic

levers for development,” she continued. Cuba proves that, even under the “most inhumane, cruel, unilateral economic sanctions.” But, she warned, it will be important for the nations of the South “to be aware that our ambition will not be a popular one as control of global innovation grants immense power over us to developed countries. Thus it is not in their interest that we succeed.” Addressing the Cuban President, she said “Let us be united as never before on this important agenda. This is the time for the South. Unity will be critical as many so-called partners will strive to divert our attention and break our unity.”

Angolan President João Lourenço noted that the summit was taking place at a time of great international complexity and worsening geopolitical conflicts, increased poverty and the heavy debt burden borne by many countries. Nonetheless, he said, developing nations “won’t stand around with our arms crossed to wait for some miraculous solutions to the problems we face.... We will know how to find the solutions and strategies that will lead us to concretize our development agenda.” Lourenço offered his support and con-

gratulations to Cuba and expressed confidence that “together we will contribute significantly to the strengthening of the organization.”

As the Havana Declaration repeatedly states, changing the rules of the game means that developing countries must act together for global development and “win-win’ cooperation for scientific and technological development.” They must have access to science, technology, and innovation with all the benefits these entail: economic growth, industrial development, solving problems to guarantee the availability of clean water, sanitation, energy, combating disease, and eradicating poverty. The declaration makes this point throughout, while fiercely attacking the criminality of imposing unilateral sanctions “with extraterritorial impact and all other forms of coercive economic measures” on developing nations which have “devastating impact on the realization of human rights, including the right to development and the right to food.” Science, technology, and innovation, the Declaration states, are the “pillars, enablers, and catalysts to support sustained, inclusive, and sustainable growth.”

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