



International Peoples Tribunal on Human Rights and the Environment

January 6, 1998

Background

The persistence of poverty, the widening gap between rich and poor worldwide, the over-exploitation of finite resources with wanton disregard of attendant environmental pollution and destruction, militarization on all continents with ever more violence, bloodshed and gross violations of human rights – this has been the global context as we approach the end of this millennium. Moreover, globalization with its bias towards the economic privileges of transnational corporations, has created a vacuum of justice, and a system of resource plunder – occurring in the name of expanding trade and investment that has enriched only a very small part of the world's population while devastating environment: local, national and global.

Against this backdrop, the governments of the world were gathering at the United Nations in June 1997 for Earth Summit II and the preparatory meetings for the Summit made it clear that vital issues were being ignored and could find no place on the Summit's agenda. Accordingly, non-governmental organizations attending Earth Summit II decided to organize the first session of the International Peoples Tribunal on Human Rights and the Environment at the very start of Earth Summit II, focusing on the theme "Sustainable Development in the Context of Globalization." Twelve cases were brought before the Tribunal. What all of these cases have in common is: human rights violations in connection with environmental destruction, justified in the name of development, economic growth, or investment. The commitments made by the governments to the Rio Principles are not being fulfilled. National and local governments have forgotten their promises to implement Agenda 21 programs.

Over the past 50 years, under UN auspices, an impressive body of international human rights law and international environmental law has been brought into existence. All peoples are entitled to human rights: economic, social, cultural, civil and political. All peoples have a human right to sustainable development. Yet, paradoxically, the International Peoples Tribunal found that the cases presented to it indicated a growing global lawlessness with governments failing or unable to hold powerful multinational corporations accountable for the human rights abuses and environmental damages they cause in their ruthless pursuit of profits at any cost, human or environmental.

Mission Statement

The International Peoples Tribunal seeks to hold governments and corporations accountable to the many international standards and conventions that already are in existence but remain, often, not enforced. These include the 27 Principles adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the large number of

international conventions and declarations on human rights and the environment.

The International Peoples Tribunal seeks to provide a forum for peoples from around the world who have no other forum in which they can present the situations they face, the harms and wrongs inflicted upon them, the rights that have been violated and their claims for accountability, justice, remedies and compensation. The Tribunal seeks to validate such claims and to mobilize global solidarity in support of their demands for accountability and justice. The Tribunal seeks to mobilize pressure worldwide, to prevent such processes of victimization and outlaw the practices that cause such environmental and human harms and wrongs. The Tribunal seeks to draw attention to problems created by processes of globalization and to protect peoples and their environments and to hold accountable and sanction those responsible for human rights abuses and environmental devastation.

The Tribunal exists to reaffirm that human rights and environmental sustainability are interdependent and indivisible.

Members of the Panel

The people who serve on the Tribunal are people recognized as having expertise in their fields and professions, or as being leaders in their communities, and as being committed to human rights and environmental protection. The panel members share informed concern for human life and have a commitment to social equity. The effectiveness of the Tribunal is derived from the international credibility and expertise of its Panel Members. This Tribunal is international and for all peoples. Therefore, every effort will be made to bring representatives from as many regions of the world as possible to serve on the panel.

Procedures to Ensure Fair Play

The Tribunal will follow the basic principles devised by the Permanent Peoples Tribunal to ensure that its proceedings will be conducted in a fair and just manner. Specifically, notice will be given to anyone alleged to have caused human rights violations or environmental destruction and implicated in the cases brought to the Tribunal for hearing. All such persons will be given copies of the written case summaries and be given the opportunity to respond in writing and by personal appearance before the Tribunal. Copies of the Tribunal's final statement will be provided to all parties, regardless of whether they have chosen to respond to the Tribunal or not. In sum, the Tribunal will be conducted in accordance with the principles of equal access and equal treatment.

To: Non-Governmental Organizations, Grassroots, Community and Victims' Organizations

From: The Organizing Committee of the International Peoples Tribunal on Human Rights and the Environment (IPT)

Re: Call for Co-Partners and NGO Solidarity and Support of Peoples bringing Cases to the Second Session of the IPT

The Organizing Committee of the International Peoples Tribunal on Human Rights and the Environment is working to increase the solidarity between NGOs and peoples around the world who are suffering human rights abuses and environmental destruction in their communities and homelands. We also seek to strengthen the CSD process.

The IPT is a forum for people and communities suffering from human rights violations and environmental destruction as a result of unsustainable development practices, which are being increasingly globalized. The Tribunal seeks to address issues such as militarization and the global arms trade, weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction, and corporate accountability, which the UNCSD process is unwilling or unable to address. At its next session, during the April 1998 meeting of the CSD, the Tribunal will address new cases focusing on the major themes being discussed at the CSD session, namely poverty, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, industrialization and fresh water. The Tribunal will also finalize the twelve cases presented at the first session of the Tribunal. The cases heard at the Tribunal will therefore make real the human and environmental impacts that are abstract themes being discussed at the CSD.

The Tribunal provides a forum for people who have nowhere else to present their situations, to identify alleged violators and to present their demands for relief, redress and justice. The people before the Tribunal are victims of growing trends of lawlessness and the lack of corporate accountability world wide. The Tribunal seeks to restore the rule of law and hold all those responsible for the human and environmental consequences of unsustainable development.

The Tribunal process provides a bridge to strengthen ties between NGOs and people in struggle and to help make new ties where none exist. The people who come before the Tribunal are involved in continuing struggles, which require solidarity before, during and after the sessions of the Tribunal. Therefore, we invite and encourage the NGOs to identify with any of the particular cases that will be heard at the second session of the IPT and take up any of the particular causes of the peoples bringing cases. Contact the case presenters to learn about their case and how your organization can share in the struggle. Make their case your case!

Try to send people from your organization to the place of struggle to learn more about the situation and how your organization can help the people there. Connect with solidarity groups around the world that are already working on your case. Learn the strategy of these groups, or help develop one for unity in action.

Identify the intergovernmental bodies within the United Nations system that have responsibility with respect to your case and pressure the officials to take action. Identify the national officials with responsibility and the private corporations and individuals who are profiting from the abuses so that public pressure can be applied.

Help the case presenters by paying for the expenses involved in coming to New York, including accommodations, meals and local transportation. Act as their hosts while they are in New York. Arrange for security passes for them so that they may attend some of the CSD meetings while they are in New York. Assist them in preparing leaflets about the case and photographs or other visual evidence that can be displayed during the tribunal, for the media, and public attending the Tribunal.

As you know, media attention has helped in the of saving lives. Develop contacts in the media and persuade them to report on the case of your choice. The case presenters need media attention in their own countries, as well, including coverage about the fact that their case was selected to be heard by the Tribunal. In your country, seek out the regional and small presses, including the campus newspapers, radios, and cable networks. When you get coverage, bring it to the major media and try to

get the story onto the wire services.

Work with the case presenters to prepare press kits and set up interviews for the case presenters in New York. Arrange a press conference for them. Try to arrange interviews with any governmental or agency offices in New York that have influence or may help. Report back to your solidarity network.

Call for Co-Partners

The members of the Human Rights Caucus and the Peace Caucus formed the Organizing Committee and found co-partners i.e., non-governmental organizations that wanted to contribute to and help with the work involved in organizing the first session of the International Peoples Tribunal on Human Rights and the Environment. NGO co-partners are welcome and needed, to help the groups that are bringing cases, and to support the work of the Tribunal and the Organizing Committee.

Please call (212) 628-0404 or (718) 349-1841 if you would like a copy of the Tribunal's published statement and a copy of the prospectus, or if you would like to be associated with the organization or activities of the Tribunal.

Invitation to Participate

The International Peoples Tribunal on Human Rights and the Environment will hold its second session on April 26 and 27, 1998, during the annual session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). The Tribunal will hear up to six new cases at that session. Limitations of time determine the number of cases that can be heard.

The Organizing Committee of the Tribunal invites cases from people who do not have a forum in their own country, either because their judicial system will not recognize their claims or, because the local remedies have been exhausted and yet the human rights violations and environmental destruction continue.

The cases submitted should demonstrate the interlinkage between human rights violations and environmental destruction, in the context of globalization. In addition, they should exemplify and make real the themes being addressed during the April 1998 CSD meetings: poverty, unsustainable consumption and production patterns, fresh water, and industry.

Since the Tribunal is international and a common language is needed, the Tribunal will be conducted in English. Case Presenters can appear with translators and additional time will be allowed for the time required for translation.

Case summaries (up to six pages of 250 words per page) submitted to the Organizing Committee within the deadline for review, will be reviewed by members of the Organizing Committee to determine if the criteria for selection are met so that the case can be heard by the Tribunal. Cases that appear to be best representative of the causes of poor people in struggle, considered to be cases that would best advance similar struggles, present a case from a region of the world not yet examined, or, considered most urgent because of violence or impending disaster will be given priority in selection.

The deadline for case submission is February 13, 1998. Guidelines for Case Presenters are available for those considering presenting a case.

Please call (212) 628-0404 or (718) 349-1841 if you need more information about submitting a case to the Tribunal, if you would like a copy of the Tribunal's statement, or if you wish to be associated with the organization or activities of the Tribunal.

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