

# GLOBAL INEQUALITY INCREASES



## FROM THE EDITOR

In our second issue of Sustainable Development Observer for 2022 we focus on the theme of Increasing Inequality – a topic the global mainstream media pays lip service to.

From growing threat of food insecurity to increasing poverty and the wealth gap – not only in the countries of the South but also in the North, as seen in recent demonstrations and protests in Canada, across Europe, the US and Australia. All these are described as “anti-vaccine” protests and its socio-economic dimensions are ignored, including placards carried by protestors that address issues other than vaccine mandates. The Western Media often describe such protestors as “conspiracy theories” to justify repressing their voices.

Worried by the increasing wealth gap and its potential to create social chaos across the world, even some 100 millionaires have called for a Wealth Tax on the rich. While the pandemic has devastated the incomes of hundreds of millions of people across the world, the world’s richest billionaires have increased their wealth many times over and most of them avoid paying taxes.

The drift towards online communications during pandemic lockdowns have helped companies like Google and Zoom to make bumper profits, and the big tech companies – that include Facebook and Twitter – have become the world’s unelected censors of information. Our features article (see page 24) on digital colonialism address this issue, which the mainstream media is unable (or unwilling) to address.

While the Western mainstream media in particular promotes vaccines - and especially the Pfizer brand – the ethics of using public funds for research and then benefiting from it to make bumper profits, while driving poor nations into debt is not seen as a “debt trap”. While such traps are being set, the world’s spending on arms has increased and the media is not asking the question “what use was it when it came to fighting the pandemic?”. The media need to promote more investments in public health where the pandemic exposed weaknesses even in western countries.

The articles on how western arms fuel devastating loss of life in the Middle East highlight the dilemma. While the feature on Timor Leste demonstrates a lack of priority given to health issues in a country that could draw on oil wealth, and another feature on Sri Lanka written mainly from the perspective of rice farmers demonstrates how an environmentally sound farm policy could go wrong when farmers are not consulted.

Dr Kalinga Seneviratne – Editor

## Issue 6 – February 2022

Bringing You Stories and Issues  
Relevant To Achieving The SDGs  
in The Post-COVID Era

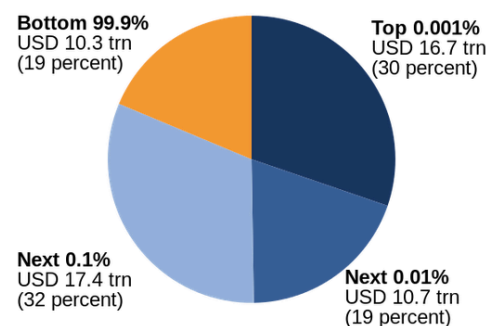
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### Cover Photo Credit:

- 1) Graphic – The-Dot
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### Global Distribution of Wealth



Source: Wikimedia Commons



A young woman carries water in a camp for displaced people in the Tillaberi region, Niger. Photo Credit: UNOCHA/Michele Cattani

## Warning of Food Insecurity in 20 Countries and Regions

By Jaya Ramachandran

ROME (IDN) — A new report by two UN agencies has identified "hunger hotspots" across 20 countries and regions where parts of the population are expected to face a significant deterioration of acute food insecurity in the coming months that will put their lives and livelihoods at risk. This warning of spiralling uncertainty relates to areas where conflict, economic shocks, natural hazards, political instability, and limited humanitarian access, are hard-hitting.

The Hunger Hotspots Report issued on January 27 by the World Food Programme (WFP) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), warns that Ethiopia, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen remain the countries of highest concern. All four countries have areas where people are experiencing or projected to experience, starvation and death (IPC Phase 5), requiring the most urgent attention.

The links between hunger and conflict are complex and far-reaching, says the report. In fact, many of the people that WFP supports are fleeing conflict and have been forced to abandon their land, homes, and jobs. These trends are likely to continue in Myanmar, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Central Sahel, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, the northern parts of Ethiopia, Nigeria and Mozambique.

### Climate and food prices

Another upsetting trend is the impact of climate extremes. For WFP and FAO, climate change "is no longer a glimpse into the future, but the daily reality for communities around the world". This can already be seen in Haiti, Eastern Africa, Madagascar, Mozambique, and recently in Afghanistan's western region of Badghis. At the same time, post-pandemic economic challenges persist and will continue to drive food prices higher, cautions the report.

Despite a brief decline in mid-2021, world food prices have been rising since May 2020. The areas of most concern are the Near East, North Africa and Central and Eastern Asia.

Humanitarian access constraints and complex security environments, continue to pose a challenge to operations in Ethiopia, Mali, northern Nigeria, Niger and Syria, and are likely to linger in the Central African Republic and Colombia, warns the report.

## **South Sudan**

The landlocked country in east/central Africa, South Sudan is considered to be one of the four countries of highest concern, where conflict and constrained humanitarian access, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges, and elevated food prices, are worsening the situation. Communities there have also had to grapple with severe flooding that has caused widespread displacement, damage to agricultural production, the destruction of livelihoods and compounded existing issues in many regions.

## **Nigeria**

In Nigeria, insecurity and high inflation rates are aggravating acute food insecurity. The situation is of highest concern in conflict-affected Borno State, where around 13,500 people are projected to slide into catastrophic acute food insecurity if humanitarian and livelihood-building interventions are not sustained.

## **Ethiopia**

There has been no update for Ethiopia since the July-September 2021 projection when experts concluded that 401,000 people in the Tigray region would likely be facing famine-like conditions. For FAO and WFP, this lack of data is of serious concern. Already the last report had identified, acute food insecurity levels are likely to have increased and could further rise beyond the Emergency and Catastrophic levels.

## **Yemen**

Due to the toxic mix of conflict and economic decline, hunger is also mounting in Yemen. As a result, half of all Yemeni families are now consuming less food than what is required. The cost of a minimum food basket in Government-controlled governorates has more than doubled. This decline is driven by the nearly depleted foreign currency reserves, which make it harder to import food. Increased humanitarian assistance between April and July of 2021 helped stabilize food security levels, but key indicators show a deterioration in the second half of the year.

## **Alarms elsewhere**

The FAO-WFP report also highlights the situation in Afghanistan, where projections show a record high of people facing critical levels of food insecurity. There is also a serious risk that part of the population will face starvation and death (IPC Phase 5) if the crisis is not contained. 22.8 million Afghans are facing acute food insecurity. By March, 8.7 million of those are expected to slide into critical levels of food insecurity (IPC Phase 4), more than double the number from the same time last year and a record high for the country.

The Horn of Africa, a region already prone to food insecurity, is now facing a third season of drought, driven by *La Niña*. In Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, the worst affected countries, projections indicate that food insecurity will rise beyond the region's already high levels by mid of year.

In the Sahel, a weak rainy season has severely affected crop and pasture development. More than 10.5 million people are projected to be at a crisis level or worse (CH Phase 3 and above), a 20 per cent increase compared to last year. [ Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 30 January 2022] (SDGs 1,2,3,6 and 13)

## **Devastating Loss of Civilian Lives in a Middle East War Fuelled by Western Arms**

By Thalif Deen

UNITED NATIONS (IDN) — The Saudi-led airstrikes in Yemen on January 21, which killed at least 70 civilians, has shifted the focus once again to the festering seven-year-old conflict in the Middle East, which the UN has described as “the world’s worst humanitarian disaster”. The disproportionate retaliation was a response to a drone attack by the Houthis based in Yemen, which killed about three Udi military coalition.



Anti-War Demonstrators in London.  
Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

The ongoing conflict has not only claimed the lives of more than 100,000 people since 2015—but also generated accusations of “war crimes” against the warring parties by international human rights organizations. While the Houthis are being armed by Iran, the Saudis and Emiratis are being equipped by Western powers, including the US, Britain and France.

The Saudi military arsenal includes F-15 fighter planes, Apache helicopters, Stinger and Hellfire surface to air (SAM) missiles, and multiple rocket launch systems (originating from the US), Tornado fighter bombers, Bae Hawk advanced jet trainers and Westland combat helicopters (from the UK) and Aerospatiale helicopters and air defence systems (from France).

The US weapons systems with the UAE forces include F-16 fighter planes, F-35 Stealth jet fighters, Blackhawk helicopters and Sidewinder and Maverick missiles while UK’s arms supplies include Typhoon and Tornado fighter bombers and cluster munitions. The UAE is also equipped with French-made Mirage-2000 jet fighters, perhaps upgraded to the Mirage 2000-9 version.

All of these weapons—and more—have been used to bomb civilians in Yemen in the ongoing conflict there. The killings are mostly due to erratic airstrikes on weddings, funerals, private homes, villages and schools. Additionally, over 130,000 have died resulting largely from war-related shortages of food and medical care.

Pieter Wezeman, a Senior Researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), told IDN the US and UK have been the largest arms suppliers to Saudi Arabia over the past 10 years and the US and France the most important arms suppliers to the UAE. In 2021, he pointed out, the Biden administration in the US pledged it will be more restrictive in its arms sales, especially to Saudi Arabia.



“However, what exactly that means remains somewhat unclear. It appears that the supply of guided bombs to Saudi Arabia has been curtailed in 2021, but the details remain uncertain. Deliveries of other equipment, in particular combat aircraft, continued in 2021.”

In Europe, a few states, for example, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands, have significantly restricted their arms sales to Saudi Arabia, due to concerns over human rights in the country and Saudi Arabia’s military actions in Yemen. Other countries have continued arms deliveries to Saudi Arabia, while the UAE has signed new arms contracts, in particular with France and the UK.

A good example, he said, is the agreement between France and the UAE for the sale of 80 new Rafale combat aircraft which are to replace older French Mirage-2000 aircraft which the UAE has used in Yemen.

Norman Solomon, Executive Director, Institute for Public Accuracy and Director, RootsAction.org posed the question: “what can be said after the president of the United States decides to sell \$650 million worth of weaponry to Saudi Arabia and then the U.S. Senate votes to approve the sale?”

Those events late last year, he told IDN, underscore “Washington’s active complicity with the barbaric Saudi-led war on Yemen”, which is not only a historic fact but also a current reality. And such events provide context for how the latest atrocities against people in Yemen have been made possible, said Solomon.

“Like Presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump before him, Joe Biden has opted to stay cosy with murderous Saudi oligarchs rather than match American rhetoric about 'human rights' with meaningful policies to promote them.”

“And the 67 per cent of the senators who voted to approve the latest arms sales have followed in the footsteps of a long line of US Congressional lawmakers who’ve preferred to grease the wheels of war machines rather than stand up for human decency,” he noted.

The current alliance between the White House and the House of Saud is the continuation of decades of chummy relations between two heavily-armed states willing to bring about massive carnage far beyond their borders while pursuing geopolitical goals, said Solomon. “Every day that the Saudi-led war on Yemen continues is a day when major responsibility for the widespread bloodshed and suffering is on the doorstep at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington,” he declared.

Meanwhile, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has condemned the airstrikes against a detention centre in Saada city, Yemen. He said initial reports indicate at least 60 deaths and over 100 injured among the inmates. Further airstrikes have been reported elsewhere in Yemen, also with reports of deaths and injuries among civilians, including children.

Guterres reminded all warring parties that attacks directed against civilians and civilian infrastructure are prohibited by international humanitarian law. The Secretary-General also called for “prompt, effective and transparent investigations into these incidents to ensure accountability”.. [Trnsmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 25 January 2021] (SDGs 1 and 16)



A boy sits amid scenes of destruction in Macomia town after it was hit by tropical cyclone Kenneth, which made landfall in Cabo Delgado province in Northern Mozambique, in April 2019. Photo Credit: Tommy Trenchard/Oxfam

## **Over 100 Millionaires Call for Wealth Taxes on The Richest**

By Rodney Reynolds

NEW YORK (IDN) — A group of over 100 millionaires and billionaires from nine countries published an open letter January 19 to government and business leaders, calling for permanent annual wealth taxes on the very richest to help reduce extreme inequality and raise revenue for sustained, long-term increases in public services like healthcare.

These super-rich signatories are joining a growing chorus of voices around the world calling for greater taxation of the richest in light of record COVID-19 wealth gains at the top of society—gains that have seen the ten richest men more than double their fortunes to a staggering \$1.5 trillion dollars. The worlds’ 2,660 billionaires now have wealth around the same size as the Chinese economy.

According to a new analysis by the Fight Inequality Alliance, Institute for Policy Studies, Oxfam and the Patriotic Millionaires, a wealth tax starting at just 2 per cent annually for millionaires and rising to 5 per cent annually for billionaires could generate \$2.52 trillion a year. This would be enough to lift 2.3 billion people out of poverty; make enough vaccines for the world, and deliver universal healthcare and social protection for all the citizens of low- and lower-middle-income countries (3.6 billion people).

The letter says that while the world has gone through an immense amount of suffering in the last two years, the richest have seen their wealth rise during the pandemic and very few—if any—are paying their fair share in taxes. The group urges governments to “tax us, the rich, and tax us now”.

The analysis found that globally: 3.6 million people have over \$5 million in wealth, with a combined wealth of \$75.3 trillion; and 183,000 people own \$50 million or more, with a combined wealth of \$36.4 trillion; while 2,660 billionaires have a total combined wealth of \$13.76 trillion.

The group published their letter during the World Economic Forum’s weeklong Davos Agenda, during which participants are expected to discuss critical global challenges and solutions. It says unless heads of state and government and CEOs acknowledge the “simple, effective solution staring them in the face—taxing the rich,” people around the world “will continue to see their so-called dedication to fixing the world’s problems as little more than a performance”.

Prominent signatories include American film producer and heiress Abigail Disney, Danish-Iranian entrepreneur Djaffar Shalchi, an American entrepreneur and venture capitalist Nick Hanauer, and Austrian student and heiress Marlene Engelhorn.

Morris Pearl, former managing director at Blackrock and chairperson of the Patriotic Millionaires said: “There is no defending a system that endlessly inflates the wealth of the world’s richest people while condemning billions to easily preventable poverty. We need deep, systemic change, and that starts with taxing rich people like me.”

Gemma McGough, British entrepreneur and founder of the Patriotic Millionaires UK said: “A common value most people share is that if something’s not fair then it’s not right. But tax systems the world over have unfairness built-in, so why should people trust them? They are asked to shoulder our shared economic burden again and again, while the richest people watch their wealth, and their comfort, continue to rise. For all our well-being—rich and poor alike—it’s time we right the wrongs of an unequal world. It’s time we tax the rich.”

The letter was circulated by the Patriotic Millionaires in the US and UK, Tax me Now, Oxfam and Millionaires for Humanity, and warns that “history paints a pretty bleak picture of what the endgame of extremely unequal societies looks like”.

Calculations are based on the most up-to-date and comprehensive data sources available. Data on the richest individuals is from Wealth-X and figures on billionaires come from Forbes’s Billionaires List (30 November 2021). [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 19 January 2022] (SDGs All)

Download Oxfam’s report - <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-kills>



The Commonwealth Secretary-General Ms Patricia Scotland and the WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Photo Credit; The Commonwealth.

## **WHO and the Commonwealth To Reinforce Cooperation on Equitable Access to Vaccines**

By Jamshed Baruah

GENEVA (IDN) — The World Health Organization (WHO) and the London-based Commonwealth Secretariat have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that focuses on ending the COVID-19 pandemic, advancing Universal Health Coverage, addressing vaccine equity, strengthening digital health systems and working towards global health security

The MoU was signed on February 7 at a ceremony held at the WHO Headquarters in Geneva by the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Ms Patricia Scotland, and the WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The Commonwealth Secretariat plays an important role in fostering and supporting greater cohesion among member states and governments across a range of policy areas and programmes. In signing the document, the two parties agreed to work together and strengthen the exchange of information on seven priority areas.

These aim at promoting universal health coverage and primary healthcare, strengthening global health security, promoting healthy environments, promoting the health of vulnerable groups, transforming lifelong learning for health impact, building a data partnership, and creating space for innovation and exchange of knowledge.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Ms Scotland said: "Equitable access to vaccines is the world's most pressing political, economic, social and moral priority. Without effective and prompt action on vaccines, we face a never-ending global health crisis that will reduce all of our wealth and security."

Dr Tedros said: "Partnership is essential in ensuring all people can achieve the highest level of health possible. The new agreement between the World Health Organization and the Commonwealth Secretariat reflects the importance of collaboration to promote and protect people's wellbeing. WHO's commitment to supporting all Commonwealth countries will be strengthened through our commitment to promoting universal health coverage, global health security and ensuring vulnerable groups receive all support needed to lead healthy lives."

The importance of the agreement lies in the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has put immense pressure on global health systems, especially those of developing countries with weaker health systems, halting progress made over the last 20 years towards attaining health-related Sustainable Development Goals. This has, in turn, put the prevention and treatment of life-threatening diseases, including cancers, diabetes, heart diseases, and malaria at risk.

The Commonwealth is disproportionately affected by a number of preventable diseases. The 25 malaria-endemic countries of the Commonwealth account for 56% of the world's malaria deaths and 54% of the world's malaria cases. Commonwealth members account for 40% of global cervical cancer incidence and 43% of cervical cancer mortality, despite having only 30% of the world's population.

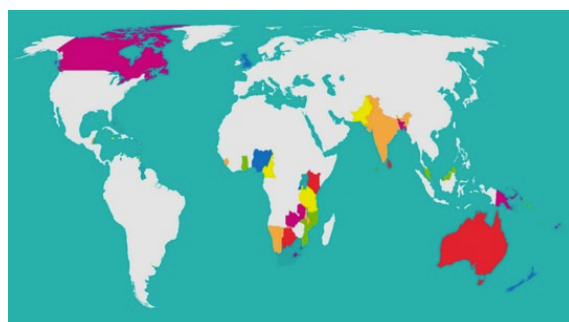
The Commonwealth and WHO will therefore reinforce cooperation to scale up global efforts to improve health outcomes across the Commonwealth. This partnership will also contribute towards the shared goal of fast-tracking the elimination of malaria and blinding trachoma, and eliminating cervical cancer, as universally endorsed by Commonwealth Heads of Government.

### **Leaving no one behind**

Besides, the global pandemic continues to pose a significant threat to public health, especially with the spread of new highly contagious variants.

As of 31 January 2022, over 77 million COVID-19 cases have been reported in the Commonwealth, with hundreds of thousands of new cases being reported daily. Furthermore, 42% of Commonwealth citizens are fully vaccinated. The percentage of fully vaccinated people ranges from 23% in African countries of the Commonwealth to 43% in the WHO Region of the Americas and 56% in the WHO Western Pacific Region.

These figures reflect the global trend of high and upper-middle-income countries procuring and administering a significant proportion of the total number of vaccines.



The Commonwealth map (coloured countries). Photo Credit; youngcommonwealth.org.

Against this backdrop, heads of the two organizations reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring equitable access and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines and advancing WHO's target of vaccinating 70% of the world's population by July 2022. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 07 February 2022] (SDG 3 and 17)





Women collecting water in Timor Leste. Photo credit: A. Reyes

## **Timor Leste: Oil Revenue Fails to Address Child Stunting**

By Annamarie Reyes

DILI, Timor Leste (IDN) — The world’s newest democracy of Timor Leste is currently confronting a surge of omicron cases after being one of the safest countries from Covid. But as it continues to manage the pandemic fairly well, the story is quite the opposite when it comes to the problem of child stunting.

The issue continues to haunt Timor Leste decades after gaining independence, with a rate of 53-57% of child stunting among its under 5-year-old children.

“Lack of proper nutrition has consequences for Timorese children’s future health, education, productivity and capacity,” says the Dili-based agency La’o Hamutuk—Timor Leste’s Institute for Development Monitoring and Analysis. They believe Timorese children do not have access to enough nutritious food and hence this has a grave impact on the next generation.

Their own analysis states: “This situation is complex and not easy to resolve. The availability of nutritious food is exacerbated because agricultural production is not a national priority, and by the prohibitive cost of nutritious foods.”

The latest report from the Global Hunger Index (GHI), indicates that Timor Leste has a level of hunger that is “alarming” just one step under “extremely alarming” on the world ladder.

Among 107 countries surveyed Timor Leste sits at 106, requiring urgent action, with only one nation—Chad—facing a more grave situation. The World Food Programme’s estimate also points to 1-2% of GDP lost to malnutrition every year, among a population of 1.3 million people.

“It’s not just about severe malnutrition; our children suffer from diarrhoea, and have no proper access to water and sanitation,” La’o Hamutuk’s Researcher of Economy and State Finance, Eliziar Febes Gomes told IDN.

Timor Leste’s Demographic and Health Survey 2016 shows only 50% of households have access to improved sanitation facilities and only 58% of people in rural areas have access to potable water in or close to their homes.

Child stunting is often a result of inadequate food consumption in terms of quantity and quality and would usually be happening over a long period of time. In Timor Leste, the problem would have begun as early as among child-bearing age women and men; who in the first place grew up undernourished or malnourished from the previous generation.

Timor people's chronic inadequate food consumption has been linked to low agricultural productivity, scarce livelihood sources, poor sanitation, water, irrigation, health and infrastructures systems as well as poor long-term financial security.

### **Young Timorese speaking out**

La'o Hamutuk's concerns for the country's children and young people is reflected in the daily lives of many young Timorese.

Tichya Gusmao whose family hails from surviving by tilling the land in the districts (Timor's rural area) is trying to do her bit. "I have joined a horticultural activity in our village, where I will share what I have learnt about nutrition and agriculture with my community to help fix our young people's problem with food," she told IDN.

On the other side of Dili, in far-flung Viqueque, Elzita struggled for a while to find a computer so she could complete her school assignment. "When it's hard, we only eat what we have on the farm. My parents get income by selling fruits and vegetables in the market. I'm learning about maternal health and want to help our young people take care of our children and new-born."

Ade wants to become a veterinarian and is an intern with an animal clinic. He says that his family's main source of income is agricultural production. "But the problem in Timor Leste is that this sector has poor income. He wants the government to help young people with basic necessities and not totally rely on petroleum oil reserves as "it will end anytime."

Similar sentiments are what's in the future horizons for Eugenia and Leao.

Eugenia is active in her local centre for youth in the Southern Bacau district, "As a young woman I want to always look into how I can contribute to helping others and not just stay at home." Leao Carvalho is juggling volunteering between nutrition and youth civic work. "We need to empower our communities to make our land more productive."

All of them are in their 20's reflecting the predominantly young population of Timor Leste with the average adult population age at 35 years old.

According to the latest Integrated Food Security Classification (IPC) report to 2023, "climate risks and hazards" have also played a serious role. In April 2021, the country suffered a devastating super typhoon where homes, services, buildings and roads were completely damaged. More than 13,000 people were displaced, 44,000 households were affected and 50 people died from the cyclone Seroja.

Meanwhile, the toll from the pandemic with the latest 156 cases, has compounded the problem. Just under 20,000 people had tested positive to Covid in 2021.

### **Oil and gas reserves depleting**

Charles Scheiner, Researcher at La'o Hamutuk has authored a report which raises concern about Timor Leste's heavy reliance on extractive resources of oil and gas.

"Timor Leste is one of the most petroleum-dependent countries in the world in terms of export revenues from oil and gas. But it's not because it has a lot of oil and gas, it's because it has very few other kinds of resources. So, money from oil and gas has paid for 86%, the great majority of state spending over the last 20 years. For example, the schools' systems and many other things that benefit children, such as with nutrition programs—even though they're not as good as we hope they would be," says Scheiner.

According to Scheiner, Timor Leste's predominantly young population were mostly born after the Indonesian occupation ended 21 years ago. But most live in rural areas growing up with inadequate food, education, health support, with few employment prospects.



Charles Scheiner  
Photo Credit: La'o Hamutuk

Only a quarter of the 820,000 working-age people are in the formal economy: mostly in construction and public administration. In jobs in Dili, related to the oil and gas industry. The rest of majority of the population rely on informal work in agriculture, farming or fishing.

There have been little benefits from the oil and gas reserves for the majority of the population. "For the 10-15 per cent of the middle class and upper-class people, their lives have significantly improved," notes Scheiner. "But if you measure more than 40% of people who are in poverty, their lives have not changed very much".

The money the government has spent has either gone to pay civil servants, or infrastructure offices for government buildings, in Dili, that helps the more affluent people. Civil servants are considered upper class.

But the great majority of Timorese are subsistence farmers, and they haven't spent much on them. "More than half of the money the government has spent has gone outside the country—to import things or pay for foreign companies to implement projects," says Scheiner.

La'o Hamutuk's has pointed out through their own investigations that non-renewable resources are depleting, and also very expensive to produce, where investors may find they're no longer economical to produce. The resource boom around 2005-12 where 23 US billion dollars were generated have run out.

Currently, the country's 86% of state spending comes from its petroleum oil reserves and at the rate of its extraction oil and gas could run out in a few years. The main exploration site Bayu-Undan has almost depleted any viable resources left.

"There have been 2 test wells that were drilled a few months ago. One onshore in Timor Leste's territory, the first onshore well in 50 years. And one offshore in a field that a small Australian company is running. They thought there was more oil to get out there. They both turn out to be non-commercial. The companies have decided not to continue," Scheiner points out.

Meanwhile, Gomes laments the fact that despite their lobbying for decades now, the problem of child stunting from malnutrition remains unsolved. "When the government is not wisely spending the money, we really worry about our future. These big (infrastructure) projects could also be a risk to our social economy and our environment," she argues.

"I can say that Timor Leste for the last 2-3 years has been in an uncertain political situation. It means that the government has not been putting our people as the centre of their decision making, but only their own interests," explains Gomes.

With a national election coming up soon, Gomes hopes, "Timorese young people will choose a good leader (who is) more concerned about our reality. I believe that if (such a new) government puts the people of Timor Leste as the centre of decision-making, we can solve our child stunting problem and will prepare our future generations (for a better life)."

Timor Leste's Presidential elections are scheduled for March 19, 2022. [ Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 11 February 2021] (SDGs 2, 3 and 6)



## Exploited Kenyan Tealeaf Pickers to Get Their Day in Court

By Lisa Vives, Global Information Network

NEW YORK (IDN) — After years of seeing their complaints stalled, postponed, and thrown out of court, some 700 Kenyan plantation workers have finally won their bid to sue a British-based tea company for imposing work conditions that they say caused crippling physical harm while getting paid poverty wages at a Kenyan tea plantation.



Kenyan tea pluckers.  
Photo Credit: ©2016CIAT/GeorginaSmith

In the landmark lawsuit, the James Finlay (Kenya) Ltd. Tea company is alleged to have exposed workers to conditions that would result in permanent damage to their spines. The case was filed by Ronald K. Onyango Advocates, a Nairobi-based human rights-focused law firm.

Tea country in Kericho—where one of Finlay’s massive estates stretches across 25,000 acres—is a hot spot for tourists who are drawn to the region’s “beautiful rolling hills carpeted in neat, bright green tea bushes as far as the eye can see,” writes TripAdvisor. “The climate here is perfect for tea with rain falling almost every afternoon.”

Yet workers have few opportunities to appreciate the area’s natural beauty. In testimony before court, tea-pickers said they had to work up to 12 hours a day in a six-day week and carry up to 26 lbs of the tea leaf pickings on their back for over half a mile of rough and hilly ground and slopes. In some cases, they were expected to collect up to 66 lbs of tea in a day or not get paid. This gave rise to tripping and falling while carrying the pickings baskets and also prolonged the bending, twisting and reaching required in gathering the tea.

The case strikes at the heart of an uncomfortable reality, wrote Emily Dugan, prize-winning reporter for the UK Sunday Times, “that British companies continue to impose working conditions in poorer countries far below what would be acceptable at home.”

In the U.S., Finlay has headquarters in Lincoln, Rhode Island, and offices in Texas and Florham Park, NJ. It is sold widely in the ShopRite chain in NJ.

In Kenya, some 7,000 people live and work on Finlay’s farms, harvesting 28 million kilos of leaves every year. The work is alleged to have accelerated the ageing of its pickers’ backs for as much as 20 years.

An initial lawsuit was filed in 2017 against the Finlay company which has been fighting the case since then. Initially, Finlay avoided liability by using a ‘complex corporate structure’ which, they claimed, alienated it from the management of its global subsidiaries.

They further deny that anybody still picks by hand. However, handpicking is still used to harvest quality tea, notes the Voice of America, because it is easier to take two leaves and a bud without damaging the plant.

Efforts by growers to introduce mechanization, however, are making headway. Hundreds of employees have lost their jobs since a court ruled last year against a union’s attempt to ban tea leaf harvesting machines. Kenya Tea Workers Union rep Jared Momanyi says job losses are likely to increase.

When contacted by the press, a spokesman for Finlay said the company was saddened by the alleged mistreatment of employees. “We cannot comment on the ongoing litigation, but Finlay’s is committed to maintaining high standards and working conditions for our employees,” the spokesman said. [Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 31 January 2022] (SDGs 5 and 8)

## Sri Lanka: Government's Badly Planned Organic Farming Policy Upsets Rice Farmers

By R.M.Samanmalee Swarnalatha



Rice farms in Sri Lanka  
Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne

POLLONNARUWA, Sri Lanka (IDN) — Sri Lankan government's badly planned organic farming policy that has banned the use of chemical fertilizer in farms has upset farmers in this rice-growing heartland and a political stronghold of the ruling coalition. The policy has also drawn criticism from agricultural experts, who warn that Sri Lanka's food security is at stake.

Chairman of Minneriya Integrated Farmer

Organization, Anil Gunawardhna argues that the government organic fertilizer program is an utter failure because it was announced without any proper program and work plan to achieve its aims.

"The government's original plan was to achieve this organic cultivation in ten years time. However, without any discussion with farmers they banned the import of chemical fertilizer," he complains.

Writing in *The Sunday Times* in May last year just after the government banned chemical fertilizer imports, agricultural scientist Saman Dharmakeethi criticized the decision predicting that it would cause loss of forests and a food crisis.

In his election campaign in 2019 under the theme of 'Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour' President Gotabaya Rajapakse, clearly mentioned that "building up a community of citizens who are healthy and productive, we need to develop the habit of consuming food with no contamination with harmful chemicals". In order to guarantee the peoples' right to such safe food, the entire Sri Lankan agriculture will be promoted to use organic fertilizers within ten years, the election policy platform said.

When President Rajapakse banned the importation of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in April 2021, he cited health concerns. The ban on its importation was imposed through an Extraordinary Gazette Notification on May 6<sup>th</sup> last year, following the Cabinet endorsement of the plan under the theme of "Creating a Green Socio-economy with Sustainable Solutions for Climate Change". The document admitted that the use of chemical fertilizers has led to better harvests but has also contaminated lakes, canals and groundwater.

For more than two decades a mysterious kidney disease has been spreading among farmers in the mainly rice-growing areas, which has baffled both hydrologists and medical experts. It is suspected that the overuse of chemicals in farming may be the cause.

### Weaning Away From "Green Revolution" Technology

With many vested interests at work, the government is learning a bitter lesson that it is not easy to wean away farmers from the use of chemicals in farming. It needs careful planning and closer consultations with farmers.

The agricultural production system in Sri Lanka consists of two traditional and well-defined components. One is the plantation section, established during the colonial period, consisting of large units, and producing perennial crops such as coffee, tea, rubber, and coconut mainly for export. The other is the smallholder sector comprised of small farms, which produce most of the country's rice, vegetables, legumes, tubers, spices, and fruits.

While, fertilizers and pesticides have long been used for the production of plantation crops in Sri Lanka, until several decades ago, most of the smallholder operations were farmed with little or no input of agricultural chemicals. Wide use of chemical fertilizer was introduced to the country during the so-called 'green revolution' in the decades 1960-70 along with "high-yielding" seeds.

### **Costly Fertilizer Imports and Subsidy**

In 2020, Sri Lanka imported (both state and private sector) foreign fertilizers worth \$259 million, representing 1.6 percent of the country's total imports by value according to Central Bank statistics. Sources indicate that the 2021 import bill could potentially total in the range of \$300-\$400 million given current international prices. By limiting and/or banning costly foreign exchange draining fertilizer and agrochemical imports, the Sri Lankan government aims to generate significant import cost savings.

But, Professor Buddhi Marambe, a former Dean of Agriculture Faculty at the University of Peradeniya in recent newspaper articles has warned that an overnight shift to organic fertilizer could lead to crop declines that in turn cause huge food shortages within months. "We have spoken based on science. Without going for evidence-based decisions, nothing will go right," he argues, refuting claims by the government that they are being manipulated. "Food security is national security," he stresses, adding, "we must have sustainable policies to ensure food security because there is no point relying on food imports from outside".

### **Rice Farmers' Grievances**

Some rural farmers have already decided not to cultivate Sri Lanka's staple rice in the ongoing 'Maha' or next 'Yala' cultivation seasons, because of the government's failure to supply necessary fertilizers. Farmers here are deeply unhappy at the sudden banning of the import of chemical fertilizer. They mainly cultivate paddy, low country vegetables, cereals, grains, and onions. However, in this 'Maha' season, they could not use chemical fertilizer, If the government promised to supply the required organic fertilizer, farmers say they didn't receive it at the correct time.

Rice farmers have thus used different fertilizer that is normally used for tea, cinnamon, and coconut. They say this season's rice harvest is very disappointing with resulting low incomes.

Piyarathna, Chairman, Eksath Sulu Farmer Organization, representing farmers from Dehiyannewela, Divilunkadawala, Viharagama, Medirigiriya areas told IDN that there are 142 farmers in their farmer organization and they cultivate more than 190 acres using minor irrigation water. "Our farmers normally harvest 100- 120 bushel (2500-3000 kg) per acre using chemical fertilizer. However, this time farmers can't expect such harvest due to improper fertilizer usage" he says, adding, "farming is now a business enterprise, (and) farmers cultivate not only for (their)consumption".

Paddy plants take around 3-6 months to grow from seeds to mature plants, depending on the variety and environmental conditions. They undergo three general growth phases: vegetative, reproductive, and ripening. "Our farmers cultivate two groups: the short-duration varieties which mature in 105-120 days and the long-duration varieties which mature in 150 days", he explained. "They (farmers) use hybrid seed and not traditional varieties. These hybrids varieties need quality fertilizer to increase the harvest. By using organic fertilizer farmers can't expect high yield".

Piyarathna says that farmers in the Polonnaruwa area have complained that the compost they have received is of inferior quality with most of the purchased compost having debris, seeds and stones.

Kapila Ariyawansa, a 38 year old farmer from the Ekamuthu Bedum Ela Farmer Organization in Mahaweli river irrigation System B told IDN that he cultivate 8 acres of low land both in Yala and Maha seasons - mainly paddy - and there are also 206 rice farmers belonging to his organization. He thinks that the proposed organic fertilizer program is not practical in their area.

“There are not enough resources to make compost in our village. Greenery vegetables can be cultivated using compost, not paddy,” he argues, because “there is no traditional varieties and only have all hybrid seeds (and) these hybrid seeds need required fertilizer for bumper harvest”. Further, he said that he had to spend Rs 23000 (USD 115) to purchase Yuria in black market.

Ariyawasnsa, predicts that the rural economy will collapse after the coming rice harvest. “Farmers won’t have the yield this time, they would get only 30 per cent of the harvest” he predicts. “Most of the people in Mahaweli area depend on agriculture”. He added that not only Mahaweli B zone, but most farmers in the Polonnaruwa District, would face bad harvests due to the government’s organic fertilizer program. “The current government’s policy (has been based on) unplanned policy decisions” he laments.

### **Farmer’s Expectation**

There is also growing interest among farmers for producing organically-grown food products and they understand the export potential for it. Some farm production units have already experienced considerable success in such ventures. Organic food production and marketing could be greatly expanded in Sri Lanka. But, research is needed to develop organic farming systems and practices that are efficient, productive, and profitable. This is the criticism the government is facing at the moment.

M.G. Dayawathi Chairman of Kalukele People’s company said that banning of chemical fertilizer has affected their company’s microfinance system too. “We have given more than 52 lakhs (5.2 million) of cultivation loans to 75 farmers for this Maha season. Unfortunately, farmers would not make the expected income and they are not in position to repay loans” she told IDN “Moreover, farmers mortgage their gold and their vehicles to purchase chemical fertilizer in the black market. They are trapped in a loan cycle. Government cannot expect livelihood improvement (among farmers) with this kind of unplanned program”.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 09 February 2021] (SDGs 1, 2 and 10)



The Mahaveli Irrigation Scheme and farming lands near Polonnaruwa  
Photo Credit: Kalinga Seneviratne



Ikoyi Bridge, Nigeria. Photo Credit: Rejoice Emmanuel, UNDP Nigeria

*Changing attitudes towards taxation can only happen if tax systems are seen to be equitable, including appropriate taxation of large corporations as well as linking tax revenues to development outcomes like improved infrastructure, healthcare and education.*

## The Global Corporate Tax Deal - An African Perspective

Viewpoint by Orria Goni and Luckystar Miyandazi

NEW YORK (IDN) — On October 30, 2021, the leaders of the world's 20 largest economies, the G20, endorsed a two-pillar blueprint to address the tax challenges arising from the digitalization of the economy. The agreement includes partial reallocation of taxing rights to market jurisdictions and a 15 per cent global minimum tax for multinational enterprises (MNEs).

Pillar One will apply to MNEs with global turnover above 20 billion euros and with a profit margin above 10 per cent, whereas Pillar Two will apply to MNEs with global turnover above 750 million euros.

It is worth noting that only 23 African states are among the 137 countries and jurisdictions set to implement this global deal - less than half of all the countries on the continent. Two of the main issues for African countries as their economies become increasingly digitalized are (i) options for better nexus and profit allocation rules mainly as source jurisdictions; and ii) opportunities for policy and administrative support to deal with illicit financial flows (IFF).

Assessing the current momentum around the worldwide tax reform deal can improve our understanding of the African context while promoting a more unified African voice on international tax cooperation and tax governance for sustainable development.

### A 'historic' corporate tax deal

The deal is an outcome of a series of consultations and negotiations as part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/G20 Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, to find the best approaches to tackle tax avoidance and evasion, and ensure that multinationals are taxed fairly. Only 25 African countries are members of the Inclusive Framework, meaning that over half of the continent did not participate in the standard-setting process.

Under the new deal, some 137 countries and jurisdictions have so far joined the two-pillar plan to reform international taxation rules and ensure that multinational enterprises pay a fair share of tax wherever they operate.



As the world continues to be driven and transformed by technology and by digitalization, many MNEs have adopted tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules and regulations to pay little or no tax in jurisdictions where they operate. For example, profit shifting refers to doing business and earning profits in a high tax jurisdiction but shifting the profits to a low tax jurisdiction and declaring them there for tax purposes.

The basic idea around the new deal is that inter-state tax competition will be limited to prevent a “race to the bottom”. As a result, governments will generate more revenues from the largest MNEs, wherever they operate. The high-level endorsement of a global tax deal is an important step in the right direction towards generating much-needed tax revenue for countries. In the present context, it can significantly help combat the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Two of Africa's largest economies not sold on the deal**

Kenya and Nigeria joined the negotiations but did not agree to the outcome. These two countries are reluctant to accept the deal as they have already taken unilateral measures to tax digital companies in their jurisdictions. For example, Kenya introduced a Digital Service Tax (DST) in 2019 and is now collecting taxes from 89 companies.

Implementing the global tax deal stipulates that countries would have to remove all unilateral DSTs and similar measures. This means Kenya would only collect DST from 11 companies that fit the requirement of global turnover and pre-tax profit.

Furthermore, they also expressed concern that the binding dispute prevention and resolution mechanism requirements may make taxing nations lose their sovereignty by compelling them to resolve tax issues in the corporations' home countries.

### **Towards a common African position?**

African countries are trying to address the lack of resources and technical tools to support significant increases in tax revenues in a complex international finance landscape. Hence the renewed focus on accelerating domestic resource mobilization (DRM). Under these circumstances, greater technical and political support is needed on the continent, to ensure that the new rules are a good fit for Africa.

African governments and stakeholders can use the momentum to highlight efforts that have been ongoing on the continent to push for Africa's taxing rights. These could include building support for home-grown solutions to address structural issues such as tax loopholes and illicit financial flows; and devising innovative systems that facilitate trade and reduce inefficiencies associated with cross-border payments and settlements.

For example, the African Union brings together all 55 African states advocating for a common position on international tax rules that African countries can champion in future. This common position would give more taxing rights to African countries and provide options for addressing illicit financial flows with less administrative complexities for implementation at the country level.

In addition, the African Tax Administration Forum (ATAF) has proposed an approach to drafting legislation on digital sales tax services that African countries can consider, which takes into consideration the specific challenges they face. The ATAF approach further aims to build public confidence in the tax system's fairness and encourage tax compliance in African countries.

By proactively participating in and committing to continental frameworks such as the ATAF, African countries will have a greater political voice and access to the technical support necessary to analyse how the global deal works for them.

### **Financing the SDGs in Africa**

UNDP supports African governments in their efforts to finance the 2030 Agenda. The UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa is rolling out a regional tax-for-SDG initiative entitled “Domestic Resource Mobilization for a Renewed Social Contract in Africa”.

This initiative will highlight the vital role of taxation and fiscal policies, including providing financing for public goods and services, redistribution, and representation. The initiative recognizes that the

link between individuals and the state is still evolving in many African countries. A progressive and fair tax system must strengthen this relationship and foster good governance.

However, a more profound social contract requires changing how people perceive taxation - not as an obligation but as a personal stake in governance. This can only happen if tax systems are seen to be equitable, including appropriate taxation of large corporations and linking tax revenues to development outcomes.

UNDP will continue to engage governments and stakeholders in Africa to develop tax and fiscal policy initiatives, including knowledge products that inform discussions on key tax issues in Africa and contribute to strengthening Africa's voice on international taxation.

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 23 January 2022]

*\* The writers Orria Goni is SDG Financing and South-South Cooperation Advisor, UNDP, and Luckystar Miyandazi is Regional Tax Specialist, UNDP. This article was posted on UNDP Blog.*

*Link to Original Article: <https://www.undp.org/blog/global-corporate-tax-deal-african-perspective>*



The U.S. Mai Lai napalm chemical attacks on Vietnamese women and children is just one example of human rights violations by the U.S. and Britain. Photo Credit: Greenlane.com

## **West's Double Standards on Human Rights Undermines UN Human Rights Council**

Viewpoint by Sugeeswara Senadhira

COLOMBO (IDN) — The United States, Britain, Canada and a few other Western so-called champions of human rights will press their unreasonable demand at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) next month to initiate an international probe into alleged human rights violations in the last phase of the separatist war against the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) terrorists 13 years ago.

The 49th Regular Sessions of the UNHRC are due to begin on February 25, 2022.

The UNHRC claim evidence has been produced but refuses to share it with Sri Lanka or their law enforcement authorities to verify its authenticity.

On February 3, the U.S. attacked and killed Islamic State leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, a dreaded terrorist, in Syria amid concerns about a potential resurgence from the terrorist group. It reflects the ongoing nature of U.S. involvement in military operations overseas, even after President

Biden pulled American forces out of Afghanistan last year. In this drone attack at least 13 civilians including six children and four women were also killed.

This kind of unavoidable civilian death could occur when the armed forces try to kill terrorists who cause scores of deaths of innocent civilians by their actions. Hence, it is unreasonable to call on President Biden to punish the soldiers who carried out the attack to kill the ISIS leader.

What is highly objectionable is the UNHRC and others who refrain from taking up such issues against the U.S. or the UK, who blame Sri Lanka for alleged civilian deaths during the last days of the separatist war against Prabhakaran, the most ruthless terrorist leader in the world who is accountable for the lives of thousands of men, women and children including a President of Sri Lanka (Ranasinghe Premadasa) and a former Prime Minister of India (Rajiv Gandhi).

### **UNHRC picks on weak nations**

The UNHRC wants to hold international investigations on the purported 2009 civilian deaths in Sri Lanka, but even after 50 years, the UNHRC is not in the least concerned about the British soldiers who killed thousands of innocent Irish civilians.

The UNHRC maintains a deafening silence on the killings of innocent Irish civilians killed by the British armed forces in Londonderry 50 years ago, despite the fact that clear evidence has been recorded that as many as 3,700 people died over the course of the four-decade conflict in Northern Ireland.



The most horrendous incident was on January 30, 1972, the Blood Sunday brutal killing of unarmed civilians holding a peaceful protest in the city of Londonderry in Northern Ireland. The people in several towns held events to mark the 50th anniversary of the brutal killing of 14 unarmed civilians by the British soldiers, who fired upon a crowd of protesters. On Sunday, January 30, the family members of those killed held roses as they participated in a walk of remembrance.

“Today we remember all those who died or were injured as a result of the atrocity on #BloodySunday50, one of the darkest days for this island,” Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin said in a tweet. “We also pay tribute to the families of the victims, whose dignity and persistence in the search for truth and justice has never wavered.”

The Voice of America said the families of the victims are despondent over whether the soldiers involved will ever face trial. Charlie Nash saw his 19-year-old cousin William Nash killed as members of the British Parachute Regiment fired more than 100 high-velocity rounds on 30 January 1972, at the demonstrators in Londonderry.

“We thought there might be rioting, but nothing, nothing like what happened. We thought at first they were rubber bullets,” Nash, now 73, told AFP. “But then we saw Hugh Gilmour—one of six 17-year-old victims—lying dead. We couldn’t take it in. Everyone was running,” he said.

A public investigation later concluded that British soldiers fired on the unarmed protesters even though none of those killed posed a threat to the soldiers.

Prosecutors announced they were pursuing criminal charges against two British soldiers who took part in the Bloody Sunday shootings, but the cases were dropped last year.

### **The UK off the hook**

What followed was most surprising. It was the introduction of the Overseas Operations Bill to protect UK soldiers from prosecution for crimes committed abroad after five years. This means that victims could be denied justice and offenders escape the law. The UK would also be violating numerous human rights treaties by not ensuring abuses are properly dealt with.

Ministers defending the Bill said, the goal of “the Overseas Operations (Service Personnel and Veterans) Bill”, is to “establish the supremacy of the law of armed conflict.” The bill, according to the Government, will put an end to the seemingly endless acts of “lawfare” against British personnel.

However, the Human Rights Watch (HRW) said, the new legislation has jeopardized the United Kingdom’s commitment to the rule of law. It was designed to make it close to impossible to prosecute almost all cases five years after the offence happened. This includes war crimes, torture or other appalling abuses. It places members of the Armed Forces above the ordinary criminal law - in a way that is completely unprecedented.

By the new Bill, the British Government effectively decriminalised torture. The critics point out that it is extremely dangerous for members of the Armed Forces to be given a free pass over alleged war crimes. Yet the Government was determined to protect those accused of torture and war crimes, instead of stopping them in the first place.

The HRW expressed fear that this Bill was one of several laws that the Government is trying to pass in the UK that is incompatible with “our human rights obligations” and added that such statute of limitations on war crimes committed by soldiers “is a blatant breach of international law”.

The above is the human rights position of the United Kingdom and its double standards. The other major accuser United States has a worse record than that. The U.S. human rights violations in Asia run into volumes from Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs, killing over 300,000 civilians instantly to Mai Lai napalm chemical attacks on Vietnamese women and children and horrendous killings of Afghan civilians.

While the UK and U.S. openly cover up and protect their soldiers found guilty of human right violation abroad, they want to probe some alleged violations in Sri Lanka, with the connivance of UNHRC, a biased organisation according to former U.S. President Donald Trump.

While everybody agrees that nobody should oppose charges being brought against nations and States who have allegedly committed War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity, it should not be a policy of pick and choose. Furthermore, one has to understand certain hardcore military actions are necessary when a State armed force fights a ruthless terrorist organisation like the LTTE, a terrorist group proscribed by many countries including the UK and the U.S. There is conclusive proof that some foreign forces including some of the very accusers and their proxies were involved in training LTTE terrorists and providing them arms in the past.

It is apparent that the accusers as well as the UNHRC only pick on weak nations in Asia, Africa and South America to highlight alleged human rights abuses and leave the affluent nations alone.

For over a decade now, the Sri Lankan government has been forced to defend itself against accusations of war crimes where no authenticated evidence has been provided by the accusers. This wastes a lot of precious resources of the Sri Lankan government in order to prevent foreign interference in their domestic affairs.

For most Sri Lankan observers it is a firm belief that the western powers are using the UNHRC in their geopolitical battles in Asia thus weaponizing human rights. The international community (outside the western block) need to rise up to this threat.

[Transmitte by IDN-InDepthNews on 12 February 2022]

*\* The writer is a senior Sri Lankan journalist and political analyst, who is the International Media Director at the presidential secretariat in Colombo. The views expressed here are his own personal views.*

## Global Food Systems Are Rife with Injustice

The COVID pandemic – alongside growing threats from Climate Change, widespread malnutrition, economic instability and geopolitical conflict – has heightened problems with the ways we produce, distribute and consume food. And it is made clear the urgent need to make global food systems more just.



Source: Daily News (Sri Lanka) - <https://dailynews.lk/2022/01/27/features/271131/global-food-systems-are-rife-injustice>

## Kazakhstan: All of the costs, none of the benefits: How inequality, abuse and corporate greed have contributed to discontent

Dozens of deaths and hundreds of injuries as authorities opened fire on protestors. Violence erupting through tear gas. Rubber bullets, followed by live ammunition. Journalists beaten and detained. Pervasive fear, even among those who have hidden inside. History has repeated itself in Kazakhstan. This month's widespread violence against protestors, mass arrests and harsh crackdowns are eerily reminiscent of the 2011 Zhanaozen massacre, which passed its ten-year anniversary just last month. This week, more reports of torture and violence have surfaced, made all the more troubling by the fact Kazakhstan was found in violation of the UN Convention Against Torture in the aftermath of the 2011 strikes. And then, just as now, workers' grievances appear to be at the heart of the unrest.

Source: Business and Human Rights Resource Center - <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/blog/all-of-the-costs-none-of-the-benefits-how-inequality-abuse-and-corporate-greed-have-contributed-to-discontent-in-kazakhstan/>

## Malaysia: Hundreds of migrant workers subject to "squalid" onsite living conditions at glove manufacturers

Personal protective equipment giant Ansell is being taken to task over its ties to a Malaysian glove maker alleged to have subjected workers to forced labour and squalid living conditions inside shipping containers. The United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) banned imports from the Brightway Group, the fifth such sanction it has imposed against a single-use glove manufacturer from Malaysia in the past two years.

Source: Business and Human Rights Resource Center - <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/malaysia-ministry-finds-glove-company-to-have-violated-law-after-raid-as-workers-found-living-in-shipping-containers/>

## Qatar: Report say migrant workers at continue to incur illegal recruitment fees

A report by the Graduate Institute Geneva alleges exorbitant recruitment fees are widespread in G4S Qatar's operations regardless of the fact the practice has been deemed illegal by authorities. The report takes an in-depth look at the operations of G4S Qatar, a G4S Global franchise which employs 8,000 workers, many of whom migrate from South Asia and Africa. Interviews have shown the serious impact of recruitment fees as migrant workers have to take out loans to afford them.

Source: Business and Human Rights Resource Center - <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/qatar-g4s-qatar-operations-allegedly-continues-to-charge-extortiate-recruitment-fees-despite-commitments-to-end-practice/>

## **UAE: Dubai Labour Court uses new legal provision to freeze employers' assets in cases of unpaid wages**



A new legal provision allows courts to freeze the bank accounts and assets of companies in cases involving unpaid wages of more than 100 workers. Dubai Courts has been enforcing the law with significant success. Once the Labour Court issues a verdict, the company's assets may be auctioned off to settle the amount due to workers. ..."Before the provision came into force, owners could sell their company's assets while a court case was continuing", the Chief Justice Jamal Al Jaber, head of the Labour Court at Dubai Courts said. "There were occasions when no funds could be found to

pay the workers' dues once the court issued a verdict..." After a ruling from the court in favour of the workers in a 2021 case, the court ordered that the company's assets be auctioned to pay the workers' dues and enable them to return to their countries of origin. The senior judge said that, in general, more than 90 per cent of labour cases are about unpaid wages.

Source: Business and Human Rights Resource Center - <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/uae-dubai-labour-court-uses-new-legal-provision-to-freeze-employers-assets-in-cases-of-unpaid-wages/>

## **Mekong River: Under the shadow of China's mega dams, millions in Southeast Asia face a fight for survival**

China plans to build the world's biggest dam in its bid to become carbon-neutral by 2060. But its hydropower ambitions are already having an adverse effect on the rivers and livelihoods of downstream communities, from Thailand to Vietnam.

Source: Channel News Asia - <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/cna-insider/under-shadow-chinas-mega-dams-millions-southeast-asia-face-fight-survival-2368571>

## **Philippines: Farmers fear crop, river contamination as mining moratorium is lifted**

With the government overturning a 2017 ban on open-pit mining in December, the farming community of Narra, Palawan fears that the return of nickel ore extraction will ravage the environment and their crops.

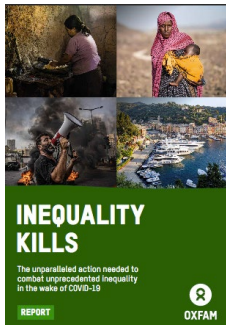


Source: Eco-Business - <https://www.eco-business.com/news/philippine-farmers-fear-crop-river-contamination-as-mining-moratorium-is-lifted/>

## **Philippines: Typhoon highlights biodiversity haven Palawan's vulnerability - and resilience**

Experts say the storm-damaged forests can recover - if they aren't disturbed by human incursions, fires, or additional storms.

Source: Eco-Business - <https://www.eco-business.com/news/typhoon-highlights-biodiversity-haven-palawans-vulnerability-and-resilience/>



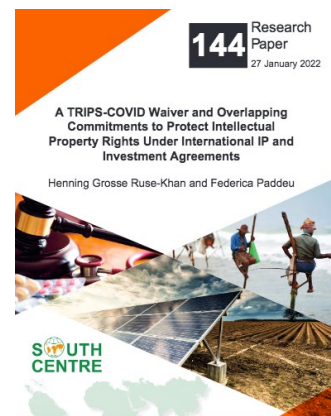
## “Inequality Kills” – OXFAM’s Briefing Paper : January 2022

The wealth of the world’s 10 richest men has doubled since the pandemic began. The incomes of 99% of humanity are worse off because of COVID-19. Widening economic, gender, and racial inequalities—as well as the inequality that exists between countries—are tearing our world apart. This is not by chance, but choice: “economic violence” is perpetrated when structural policy choices are made for the richest and most powerful people. This causes direct harm to us all, and to the poorest people, women and girls, and racialized groups most. Inequality contributes to the death of at least one person every four seconds. But we can radically redesign our economies to be centered on equality. We can claw back extreme wealth through progressive taxation; invest in powerful, proven inequality-busting public measures; and boldly shift power in the economy and society. If we are courageous, and listen to the movements demanding change, we can create an economy in which nobody lives in poverty, nor with unimaginable billionaire wealth—in which inequality no longer kills.

To Download the full report go to - <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/inequality-kills>

## Research Paper No. 144 A TRIPS-COVID Waiver and Overlapping Commitments to Protect Intellectual Property Rights Under International IP and Investment Agreements – South Center January 2022

This paper considers legal implications that are likely to emerge from the implementation of a TRIPS Waiver decision. Assuming that a Waiver is adopted in the form presented in the May 2021 proposal by South Africa and India et al, we review the interaction between the Waiver and other commitments to protect IP rights under international IP and investment treaties. Our principal research question is to analyze whether domestic measures implementing the Waiver are compatible with the implementing State’s other obligations to protect IP rights established under multilateral IP treaties, IP and Investment Chapters of FTAs as well as BITs. In light of typical examples for such overlapping commitments, we first focus on (1) defences directly affecting compatibility with these treaty commitments (here referred to as ‘internal’ defences). In a second part, we review (2) potential defences under general international law that may serve to justify (in other words, to preclude the wrongfulness of) such measures. We conclude that often internal and/or general defences will operate to support the implementation of the Waiver despite overlapping commitments in international IP and investment law. This conclusion is reinforced by a purpose-oriented understanding of the TRIPS Waiver as authorizing measures necessary to achieve the goal of “unimpeded, timely and secure access” for all to covered medical technologies “for the prevention, treatment or containment of COVID-19”.



To Download Report go to - <https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/RP-144.pdf>

## Research Paper 145: The Right to Health in Pharmaceutical Patent Disputes by Emmanuel Kolawole Oke (South Center)

This paper examines how the courts in three developing countries (Kenya, South Africa, and India) have addressed the tension between patent rights on pharmaceutical products and the right to health. It explores the justiciability of the right to health and analyse how the courts in these three developing countries have adjudicated some of the pharmaceutical patent cases involving tensions between the right to health and patent rights. The paper contends that by incorporating the right to health into the adjudication of patent disputes, courts in developing countries can play a crucial role in improving access to medicines at affordable prices. To Download Report go to - [https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/RP-145-The-Right-to-Health-in-Pharmaceutical-Patent-Disputes\\_EN.pdf](https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/RP-145-The-Right-to-Health-in-Pharmaceutical-Patent-Disputes_EN.pdf)

## The Covid Endgame and Digital Colonialism: Cyber War Simulacra in An Upside-Down World

Viewpoint by Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake

COLOMBO (IDN) — The greatest transfer of wealth in human history took place during Covid-19 lockdowns with Covid masks and Personal Protection Equipment. The rest of the world was impoverished. But the tipping point is here now: Two years of Covid 'panidemic' and WHO staged 'Permanent Emergency' has shown us that 'the Emperor has no clothes', comprehensively.

In the 'West' versus the 'Rest' face-off, which the Covid-masked new hybrid Cold War looks like, the Rest has come out on top - having bested the West. The Euro-American Empire is almost done and dusted; its legitimacy shattered as the Truth leaks out: The Gain of Function (GoF) research-based, Covid virus and vaccine bio-warfare project (partly subcontracted to Wuhan labs), to digitalize, govern the world, its wealth, populations and migration with a CV-Mask, while taking down "emerging economies" and 'China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is coming apart at the seams. By now, it is not a secret that Moderna's mRNA injection was a United States (US) Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) program to manufacture 'vaccines' at 'warped speed'.

All the Data shows that Covid-19 was mild in the Global South, particularly in Asia and Africa, which has beaten the virus without 'vaccines' despite poverty and poor health care systems.

Rather, Covid-19 appears to have decimated and divided the 'First World' despite and arguably because of its advanced biotechnology and Big Data-dependent Health Systems and mRNA injections and global human genome maps. Not to mention over-consuming, co-morbidities-intensive, hyper-digital lifestyles.

The Global South has outperformed the so-called "advanced" techno-cyborgs of the West on Covid-19. So too it seems the other Emergency, CoP-26, a.k.a. Climate "Emergency" and Anthropocene discourse (Agenda 21), meant to bend the Rest to the corporate agri-business and energy agenda of the West, to enable "Green-washing" of big and dirty oil companies and their rebranding as captains of clean, green renewable (LNG) energy technology as part of Climate catastrophe 'Disaster Capitalism'.

The boot is now on the other foot! The West will have to eat humble pie and learn how to fight Covid-19 from the "Rest" - the colonized and denigrated Third World - Africa and Asia, with its teeming masses. Covid-19 has also deeply divided 'First World' societies and economies (Euro-America and its NATO, QUAD and AUKUS allies), where democracy seems increasingly a farce for the rich and connected to perform. The Covid-19 'panidemic' increasingly looks like a disease of the "First World" although it was supposed to target 'minorities' everywhere.

In Africa fewer than 30 per cent are 'vaccinated' but Covid deaths are few, and so too, in much of Asia with its huge populations. This, despite the Hunger Virus unleashed by the World Health Organization's (WHO), criminal Lockdown policy recommendations that have caused mass impoverishment.

Indeed, it increasingly appears that the mass rollout of inadequately tested and trialled Pfizer and Moderna mRNA injections have done much of the damage to Euro-American populations as the numbers of Vaccine Adverse Events (VAE), Antibody-Dependent Enhancement (ADE) cases mount. Covid-proofing with leaky gene-therapies simply has not worked in the rich West. The next pandemic would be of the 'vaccine' injured.

Simultaneously, Democratic Rights and freedoms are being stripped fast and loose with the Covid-19 mask at hand in so-called "advanced" Western Democracies, as vaccine mandates and passports kick in amidst massive protests on the streets and in the Courts.



The US and Europe with their vaccine cards, bio-politics and digital surveillance are hardly beacons of Democratic Rights, Liberty and Freedoms these days, and certainly cannot lecture anyone on Social and Economic Justice, Rights or Equality. Just remember Julien Assange languishing in Belmarsh Prison for exposing the war crimes of the Empire.

### **Vaccine and mask mandates have taken “Divide and Rule” to a whole new level.**

Clearly, the Covid-19 narrative to legitimate snooping on one’s own citizens and cover-up 'Digital Colonialism' under the guise of protecting Society and Community while destroying our COMMUNITY, RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL LIFE and digitally hacking our brains and bodies with lockdowns and injections is not working.

“Society must be Defended' was how the brilliant Philosopher and Historian of ideas, Michel Foucault, who died of AIDS, which he also knew was invented in a Lab (just like the Fall Army Worm that destroyed crops and food security in Africa and Asia not so long ago), ironically glossed the Orwellian bio-warfare program. Indeed, it is quite clear that ‘society’ and communities as Social Scientists know them had to be Destroyed and Digitalized in order to be defended, masked, surveilled and controlled by Big Brother. This irony has however been lost on a great majority of acquiescent social scientists as pop psychology and therapy has displaced social and communal life and indigenous healing systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, or Unani.

### **Wither the Imploding Empire that won't go ‘quietly into the night?**

Postmodernist and social theorist Jean Baudrillard argued that a simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right: the hyperreal. We have lived two years of Covid hyper-reality.

Of course, Pax Americana and its NATO-AUKUS imperialism is not dead yet and evidently refuses to go 'quietly into the night' as Asia led by China and ASEAN rises once again as the global growth centre. Rather, Joe Biden is on the warpath with America's old Cold War rival, Russia, while Stoking a New Cold War with China, having concocted AUKUS to encircle both while egging on the EU part of NATO to fight Mr Putin in Ukraine. But this kite will not fly!

The Pax Americana was always a Hot War; partaking of coups, assassinations, staged terrorist attacks and riots as regime change operations like the “Jakarta Method”, and proxy wars in the Global South, while a Cold War prevailed in the Global North. It is in this context, that strategic Sri Lanka perched in the middle of the Indian Ocean, governed by dual American citizens of the Rajapaksa family, is an outlier in the Global South with almost 70 per cent of its population vaccinated.

Sri Lanka sits at a chokepoint among Indian Ocean Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and is in the crosshairs of the new Cold War's vaccine Geopolitics. The US citizens who rule this post/colony are desperate (like India's Modi) for a vaccine victory following self-inflicted economically devastating Lockdowns and attendant millionaire migration and brain-drain to the West amid the pandemic of corruption.

Simultaneously, South Asian ethnoreligious Diaspora networks in AUKUS countries have been Weaponized to advance the economic and security interests of the Deep state and against the interests of those of us actually living and working in the Global South at this time.

Hence, the West is still pushing the Covid-19 and CoP 26 Climate Catastrophe narrative to enable Disaster Capitalism and ensure Global Governance through Digital Colonialism; Euro-American Corporate Captains and Hedge Funds like BlackRock that got huge chunks of the “bailout” continue to asset strip the Global South.

Booming stock markets are an indicator of the asset stripping and massive wealth transfers going on everywhere as people are impoverished. the current surge in the stock market amid mass impoverishment and what Oxfam terms the ‘Hunger Virus’ amid spiralling inequality look like something out of Ripley’s Believe It or Not—a “phantom market,” as a Colombo Stock Exchange analyst put it.

What is increasingly clear is that the Euro-American Global Reset project is headquartered between Geneva (where the DAVOS/ WEF clique and various UN agencies like the WHO and ILO that funds and controls Trade Unions that have been promoting Covid-19 Lockdowns hold sway), and Washington with its military business intelligence, research, and media industrial complex that President Dwight D. Eisenhower famously warned U.S. citizens about in his farewell address in 1961.

Novak Djokovic is the latest Celebrity victim of the Global Governance dream project of the Deep state Military Business industrial complex in tow with the DAVOS clique. Djokovic was rendered a spectacle by Australia's judicial system and puppet Prime Minister who had earlier rushed to dis France (which is competing with and waging a high stakes battle for its share of the Indian Ocean with the Anglo-Old Commonwealth's Pakkha Sahibs), for AUKUS.

After all, Djokovic's defiance of Australian Vaccine Mandates advertised on pacifying Global Sports Media channels cannot be tolerated in Vaccine-card carrying Covid Democracies!

It is not a secret that the world's top ten wealthiest doubled their wealth last year.

US digital giants, known as GAFAM (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, and Microsoft), aside from Big Pharma are the biggest beneficiaries of the Covid-19 global wealth transfers and re-set: Indeed, big Pharma funded WHO's Covid-19 Pandemic would not have been possible without Digital Colonialism, which it has in turn deepened.

'Digital nomads' along with BPO or Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) have also enabled business-intelligence agents' game global and local (social) media narratives around the world while promoting the "Permanent Emergency" to destabilize, distract and digitalize communities. Online the message is surveilled and controlled, while the reality is encased the Covid-19 'Infodemic' and numbers game.

Concealed in this cyber simulacrum is truth and the big picture. The Permanent Covid and Climate 'Emergencies' have enabled a Pandemic of Corruption and unprecedented division of societies and communities, Divide and Rule amid digitalization. Simultaneously, many are so distracted with mask-policing of their neighbours that the looting of national wealth by corrupt politicians and Digital Corporates passes unnoticed.

However, "All that's solid melts in the air': The paper money castles of Euro-American Hedge Funds like Black Rock which backs India's Adani and Ambani may disappear no sooner the Undersea Data Cables (UDC) are clipped or taxed to end the inequality pandemic and financial wealth transfers, that keep stock markets high. After all, we cannot eat or breath data, even in this era of data fetishism in the Information Economy!

Finally, since the US has printed USD 9 Trillion as "Covid Bailouts" in the past two years and is the most indebted country on the planet, the Trillion Yuan question now is: how long will it take for the US dollar to crash as the chickens come home to roost and the masks come off?

[Transmitted by IDN-InDepthNews on 28 January 2022]

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*Sustainable Development Observer* is a product of INPS Southeast Asia  
in association with IDN-In Depth News  
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