

Debates At UN General Assembly Focus on Same Issues and Nothing Happens



The General Assembly debate at the United Nations is underway until the 3rd. of October. In the past for the most part speeches at the UN, at the General Assembly, have been absolutely dull and predictable unless you had someone like Chavez, as we did back in 2006. calling George W. Bush the devil.

Again although one of the really great things about these meetings is that various presidents make profound comments, particularly on issues related to the structure of the UN, how undemocratic the process is and how it actually fails its Charter again and again and again. But critics say that year after year these comments are made and nothing happens.

This year Latin American leaders have and are consistently voicing their views on the economic crisis wreaking havoc on the Latin American peoples' human rights and human development, both ecologically and economically. The very issues that the UN as a whole is supposed to address worldwide. Let's have a look at some of the key leaders and what they had to say.

The strongest critique of the non-application of some of the basic principles of the UN Charter came mostly from Latin American countries. And they don't mince their words, that's what's particularly

impressive. President Raul Castro and president Rafael Correa both spoke eloquently about the charter of fundamental rights, and the fact that those human rights and economic rights simply remain an utopia for most of the people in the world. And there were others like Evo Morales and Cristina Kirchner that raised the same issues.

Indeed things have gone in a backwards direction since 1945. More people are hungry, more people dying of curable diseases. Global military expenditures, and this is one thing that Raul Castro and Evo Morales both raised, reaching nearly \$2 trillion a year. The money could be better spent on dealing with the problem of climate change and poverty.

Again, some leaders, like Evo Morales, are against the whole concept of a Security Council since this creates a system where some countries are more equal than others. The hierarchy where powerful countries with nuclear weapons have a say over the other 180 countries and the international policy directed towards them.

President Rafael Correa goes as far as talking about the rights of nature. And this is something that's embedded in the Ecuadorean constitution. It's a concept that is relatively new in the area of international law, that has not been assimilated in the West, but a very interesting one. And one of course that's also defended by the government of Evo Morales.

Some of the speeches talk about immigration as a human right. The importance of immigration that has been criminalized in not just Latin America but also in Europe, in Asia.

The immigration and refugee crisis around the world has been highlighted, of course, in the sense of people fleeing the conflict in Syria and Iraq, and really northern Africa as a whole, flooding both economic and war-torn areas and coming to Europe, and that's what we are seeing in the press. But even more important in terms of Latin America is the refugee and immigration crisis across the border between the U.S. and Mexico.

A lot of the leaders spoke about the refugee problem in Europe. But speaking from a view very much informed by the migrant crisis that we've seen in Latin America, and particularly Central America, of course, coming from the Northern Triangle, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador. There's a consciousness of the sort of similarities, and the fact that this is conflict driven, and also driven by a world system that is deepening inequalities, particularly in the developing world today.

Rafael Correa sort of made a good point about the hypocrisy around the whole free market discourse, where there's free movement of capital that's very much encouraged and promoted by the U.S. and European countries, but at the same time they want to block the movement of labor, of people, of individuals. But when they're seeking better lives elsewhere, then the free market mentality no longer holds water.

There's also something that is raised by, particularly, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa, where in both countries you've seen some amazing development occur, where thanks to very functional economic development policies you've had wealth in the countries that's grown enormously, and it's been fairly well distributed. A lot of people have been pulled out of poverty. On the whole the lives of people in these countries are much better than what they used to be.

Rafael Correa framed this very interestingly in terms of how the so-called developed world seeks to impose certain sacrifices on the developing world. The developing world that is trying to follow the model of the so-called developed world today, and industrialize and so on. They're trying to use their natural resources to expand their national wealth. And at the same time you have countries of the global North that are telling them you've got to stop doing that because we have to save the world, we have to deal with climate change, and so on. Therefore we're asking you to make major sacrifices and bring down your level of emissions, and so on.

And at the same time there is a blockade against developing countries where intellectual property rights that are so important in the knowledge economy. A major thing that's not accessible to developing countries. All the patents come primarily from the U.S. and Europe, and are heavily protected for years and years, preventing access. So you have a fundamental structural injustice that's keeping the developing countries in their current state, and they're being asked to make sacrifices!

Justly, both Evo Morales and Rafael Correa say fine! We will protect our environments, and we'll cease exploiting some of the natural resources. But then you have to compensate us for doing that. And that's a fair appeal that they're making. If developing countries are going to make sacrifices that will prevent them from developing, then the northern countries that are largely responsible for the mess we're in, in terms of the climate today, should pay up.

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