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ICWA Guest Column

**Non Aligned Movement – can Venezuela host the
next Summit ?**

by



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The next (17 th) Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) is to be held in Venezuela. That country will take over the Chairmanship of the movement from Iran, for the next three years, according to the established rotational practice of NAM and the decision of the last Summit in Iran in 2012. Therefore the situation in Venezuela, (where the opposition rightist MUD coalition scored a decisive victory over the Chavez inspired PSUV in the December 2015 legislative elections) will be closely watched. Would Venezuela be able to organize the NAM Summit and bear the responsibility for leading the NAM ?

Non Aligned Summits have been held fairly regularly every 3 years in the past. The exceptions were during 1964-70 (when Zambia took over from Egypt), and 1979-83, when India took over from Cuba. The latter situation arose as Iraq could not host the Summit in 1982 due to its conflict with Iran, and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi agreed to host the Summit in March 1983. The situation in Venezuela has already resulted in the postponement of the 17 th Summit from its original schedule in 2015 to a date yet to be fixed, in 2016. The crucial Foreign Minister level meeting of the Coordinating Bureau which usually prepares the outcome for the Summit has also been postponed with no date announced.

The member ship of the NAM presently consists of 120 member States and 16 Observer countries, and a number of guests which are determined at each Summit. The regional break up is of interest. Africa is best represented with all 53 African countries as full members. Asia plus Oceania has 40 full members, and 4 observers (China, Kazakhstan, Kirghizistan, and Tajikistan). The Americas has 26 members, and 7 observers (Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay). Europe has only 1 member (Belarus) and 4 observers (Armenia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine). Since 1992, no European country has hosted a Summit, and the chairmanship has rotated among Asia, Africa, and Americas regions.

The NAM has its strongest support base in Africa, followed by Asia, and is weaker in the Americas. Several major Latin American countries have remained observers, perhaps due to the influence of the US which has been for long the dominant power in the region and regarded the NAM as basically a supporter of the Soviet Union. With the end of the cold war, the breakup of the Soviet Union, and the rise of China, the question of what role NAM play has been widely discussed and debated. The common threads emerging seem to be that NAM should become a force against dominance of one or a

few countries and for democracy in the international system, both in the political and economic spheres. In this sense, the NAM is a platform for articulating and supporting demands for reform of the UN system, including the Security Council.

In addition NAM can counter the trend towards dismantling the development oriented agencies and programmes of the UN system, in favour of strengthening the enforcement and regulatory agencies. This has been led by the US, UK and several OECD countries during the past decade. This effort has been carefully cloaked in terms of improving efficiency, reducing duplication, and insisting that development could be better handled through bilateral channels. UNIDO, WHO, ILO, UNESCO and FAO have all been targets of this onslaught. On the other hand, agencies such as IAEA have been given favourable treatment as they serve to perpetuate the existing balance of power through unequal treaties such as the NPT, and even within the IAEA, development is sought to be downsized and safeguards enhanced.

There are also numerous conflicts and issues that have been in the forefront of concern. These include conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and the spread of terrorism to many countries. The UN Security Council has not been able to find solutions due to persisting geostrategic interests of some major powers including the permanent members. The disease of state failure is spreading to many states. The global economy remains in a turbulent condition, while development deficits widen across the globe. Solution to the problem of climate change forces governments to work together for collective survival of humanity, but the prosperous nations are unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices. The Ebola outbreak vividly brought out the failures of the international system to respond to such outbreaks in the developing world. Given this scenario, NAM can and should play a useful role in addressing global issues.

The collapse of oil prices has hit Venezuela hard and plunged it into an economic emergency and raised the prospect of an imminent sovereign default on debts. Venezuela is one of the so-called Fragile Five OPEC members (including Libya, Algeria, Nigeria, and Iraq) most at risk from significant instability amid the turmoil in prices, according to analysts. At \$30 a barrel, Venezuela would use up 90% of oil export earnings just to service debts to external creditors. It has sought an emergency meeting of OPEC to counter the drop in oil prices, but some major oil exporters are unlikely to go along. Internal divisions

between the President and Government led by Nicholas Maduro (inheritor of the Chavez mantle) and the Parliament dominated (with 105 out of 167 seats) by the opposition MUD are likely to intensify into protests and violence. The declaration of an economic emergency and speculation about draconian taxation measures may result in further flight of capital and instability. The government's projection of the present crisis as a western backed destabilization attempt does not help matters.

In this situation, it is hard to see the government being able to host large international conferences such as NAM. Much will depend on whether Venezuela can obtain relief from its external creditors or secure substantial international financing. However, it would be up to the Venezuela's government to indicate whether it can hold the NAM summit or request that another host country be found, which will require further consultations. Given NAM's relative weakness Latin America, it would be difficult to find another host country from the region. Perhaps Cuba and Iran, the present Chairman, could consult the Maduro government and find a way out of the situation.
