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Third Hemispheric Forum Against the FTAA

On January 26, more than 1,000 delegates from 32 countries convened the Third Hemispheric Forum Against the FTAA in Havana, Cuba. The forum was hosted by the Cuban chapter of the Continental Social Alliance and included representatives from peasant organizations, indigenous peoples, students, parliamentarians, jurists, trade unions, political parties and others from across the continent.

This year's meeting, which aims at coordinating the actions of all forces opposed to FTAA, is taking place at time when the 2005 deadline for completing the FTAA is approaching.

In addition to exposing the disastrous effects of the economic program of neo-liberalism and capitalist globalization, speakers summarized some of the advances of the social movements opposed to the FTAA.

Speakers pointed to the new dangers arising from the new U.S. tactics of trying to use bilateral and multilateral trade agreements to push through the same anti-national, anti-people provisions as contained in the FTAA program. These

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U. S. Plans Afghan Offensive in Spring

On January 28, the Chicago Tribune reported that the Bush administration is preparing a U.S. military offensive in Afghanistan this Spring, that would involve cross-border raids into neighboring Pakistan.

Citing sources familiar with details of the plan, the Tribune reported that the Pentagon is assembling a team of military intelligence officers and special forces that would be posted in Pakistan ahead of the operation. The offensive would involve Special Operations forces, Army Rangers and Army ground troops. A Navy aircraft carrier would also be deployed in the Arabian Sea, the report said.

A source familiar with details of the plan said "This is not like a contingency plan for North Korea, something that sits on a shelf. This planning is like planning for Iraq. They want this to be executable, now."

The plan is characterized within the Pentagon as "a big effort" in the next year, the report said. A series of planning orders for the offensive were issued in recent weeks, the Tribune said, and the deadline for key planning factors for the military was Jan. 21.

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World Social Forum in India

From January 16-21, the 4th annual World Social Forum (WSF) was held in Mumbai (Bombay) India.

For six days, over 150,000 people from 132 countries participated in conferences, workshops, rallies and marches opposing neo-liberalism and the economic dictates of U.S. and European monopolies. In numerous meetings, trade union activists, members of peasant organizations, environmental groups, etc., discussed opposition to the debt imposed on the developing countries, environmental and human rights issues and many other concerns.

Participants at this year's World Social Fo-

rum emphasized not only opposition to capitalist globalization, but also the urgent need to take action against the U.S. war on terrorism and the occupation of Iraq. A concluding agreement was reached on the need for organizing a global anti-war march on March 20th, the one-year anniversary of the

U. S. invasion of Iraq. The forum also took a stand in solidarity with Cuba and called upon the U.S. to lift its economic blockade of Cuba and end its interference and aggression against that country. Demands were also raised to oppose the growing number of U.S. military bases

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U. S. Army Plans to Increase Military by 30,000 Forces

On January 28, the U.S. Army announced that it will increase its size by 30,000 troops as part of a government-authorized "emergency authority."

Army Chief of Staff, General Peter Schoomaker told Congress "Right now, I've been given the authority by the Secretary of Defense to grow the Army by 30,000 people....under emergency powers,"

The Army is already nearly 500,000 strong due to authorization by Congress under the emergency provisions the Pentagon recently invoked. These so-called "stop-loss" orders prevented soldiers from leaving or retiring from the military.

Schoomaker told reporters after the hearing the Army would move quickly to add nearly 20,000 more forces, saying, "We want to achieve it as quickly as we can." He also said he wanted the additional troops to be incorporated into the Army's efforts to transform itself into a "lighter, more mobile force."

Rep. Ellen Tauscher, a California Democrat, spoke at the same Congressional hearing, arguing for a permanent higher level military force. She is pushing legislation to increase the size of the Army, Air Force and Marine Corps for five years at an estimated cost of up to \$4 billion.

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bilateral and multilateral agreements imposed by the United States were labelled as different heads of one hydra that have to be cut off.

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throughout the world. A massive march at the conclusion of the WSF on January 21, attracted over 100,000 people, and filled the streets of Bombay with banners denouncing the U.S. war against Iraq. The march was led by a giant banner declaring "Another World is Possible!"

The WSF was meant to be a counterpoint to the World Economic Forum, a summit of capitalist political and business leaders at the Swiss alpine resort of Davos, which was being held at the same time.

After the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001, organizers drafted a "Charter of Principles," which states, in part, "The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism."

Next year's WSF is scheduled to be held again in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

U.S. Plans Afghan Offensive (from page 1)

Thousands of U.S. forces would be involved, the report cited planners as saying. Some of the 10,600 U.S. troops now in Afghanistan would be shifted to the border region as part of regular troop movements, and some would be deployed within Pakistan.

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