

BRICS – Do not carve Africa! Do not dig south Durban!

A message from ‘brics-from-below’

We have gathered in Durban from the 22nd to the 27th of March at many different brics-from-below sites. We went deep into Durban’s lowest-income and highest-polluted communities, to the main university, and to the Diakonia church for a two-day conference – and today to the doors of the BRICS Heads of State Summit at the International Convention Centre.

During these past days, we have worked with many people across Durban, South Africa, the rest of Africa and the rest of the world, to better understand the impacts of BRICS. We are community and social movements, trade unionists and environmentalists from all continents and, specifically from BRICS and African countries. In common, our social and ecological wealth is being destroyed and extracted – not only by the old colonial system, but now also by the BRICS.

We recognise how much is at stake, and so we have scrutinised the claims, the processes and the outcomes of the BRICS summit and its aftermath. We are doing so at a very practical level and not only at the level of policy. We are very worried about the potential for BRICS heads-of-state and 15 allies amongst African elites, to continue the processes of neocolonial extraction and destruction.

The best example of this, close to home, is the vast south Durban port expansion and petro-chemical investment, costing R250 billion in the next three decades, according to a 2011 municipal plan.

During these days we met with the south Durban community at the Settlers Primary School, where learners have the highest recorded level of respiratory disease globally, due to the pollution levels in south Durban from oil refineries and other toxic industries. We also visited the south Durban residential area to witness for ourselves the reality of ‘maldevelopment’. What was inherited from the apartheid regime is now being reinforced by the present government, whose orientation is to elite-centric, consumerist, financialised, eco-destructive, climate-insensitive capital accumulation. Central to this the import and export of commodities, which presently fill 2.5 million containers that go through Durban’s harbor each year – but which planners believe will rise to 20 million by 2050.

We have seen their plans infrastructure investment in a ‘dig-out port’ on the old Durban International Airport site and expansion of the present port, in Clairwood. We have seen how this will result in people losing their land, livelihoods and residential areas, as well as the social fabric of communities stretching from Umbilo through to Isipingo, with extreme damage in Clairwood and Merebank.

We have heard the demands of the people of south Durban. They do not want these ports that will make them poorer. The people in south Durban have said they want:

- Proper consultation and community involvement in decision making
- People before profit
- Economic growth must be from below for the people
- People centered development

What they say they do not want is:

- a more powerful corporate/state elite and renewed crony capitalism
- more vulnerability of our industries to neocolonialism and globalisation
- privatization and land grabbing
- evictions, displacement, poverty and scarcity
- nuclear energy, because of the damages it can cause
- tenders to cronies, because jobs don’t pay appropriate wages and because of Durban’s epidemic of tenderpreneurship corruption

- development without economic transformation

What south Durban residents – and many others from across the city – told brics-from-below is that infrastructure *is* desperately needed:

- houses and jobs (there should be no more shacks)
- water, proper toilets and electricity
- roads and municipal waste collection
- libraries and recreational facilities
- good schools with free education, including the FET colleges
- clinics that are well maintained and provide good service
- cultural facilities
- good, safe public transport
- access to land for food sovereignty
- infrastructure built with ecological sustainability

The brics-from-below gathering says to BRICS – remember “AMANDLA AWETHU”! The investments being planned by BRICS elites – and in particular the South African government – do not do much to improve peoples’ lives. The solution to BRICS is to be found *below*, across Africa! We have a very important wealth, which is civil society unity, because people in Africa can unite even in difficult situations.

The 21st century belongs to those who love life and not those who destroy life.... UBUNTU! The history of our children is in our hands and with these words and actions we support the community of south Durban in their resistance to elite driven port expansions which will result in loss of land and community.

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