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Civil society call for boycott of IMF/World Bank Meetings

163 Organizations from Around the World in Solidarity with Those Banned & Deported

Civil society organizations today announced a boycott of all official events at the IMF-World Bank Meetings in Singapore. The boycott has been endorsed by 163 organizations from all parts of the world, and includes many organizations that have long assumed prominent roles in civil society interactions with the international financial institutions.

This call comes in response to news that the Singapore government has barred entry to a number of civil society representatives, including many who had already been accredited to attend the meetings by the IMF and World Bank. About 20 people have been deported or “refused entry” to Singapore. The Singapore government also pressured the Riau Province (Indonesia) government to cancel alternative events on the neighboring island of Batam, but the Indonesian government has allowed them to proceed.

“Our boycott is a response to egregious hypocrisy,” said Ana Maria Nemenzo, President of the Freedom from Debt Coalition, Philippines, and one of those informed in advance that she would not be allowed into Singapore despite receiving accreditation to the meetings. “While World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz prepares to launch his new good governance and anti-corruption initiative, he fails to promote those very principles for his own institution as it meets in Singapore. Civil society has long been unsatisfied with their marginalization by these institutions, but this takes that problem to a new low. The events of the last week, including the blacklisting of 28 pre-accredited civil society representatives and an unknown number of others from around the globe, expose the Bank’s failed commitment to transparency, accountability and basic civil rights.”

Both Wolfowitz and IMF Managing Director Rodrigo Rato have said they are unhappy with the Singapore government’s actions, but the civil society organizations, which had planned on using the space in Singapore to advocate for reduced IMF/World Bank involvement in economic policy-making and in dubious infrastructure development projects, have been far from satisfied with the response.

“These institutions are most comfortable in countries without respect for civil liberties and human rights,” said Sameer Dossani of 50 Years Is Enough: U.S. Network for Global Economic Justice. “They came under fire the last time they held the meetings outside Washington – in Dubai in 2003 – and could not have been in the dark about Singapore’s track record when they chose it. Certainly the announcement in January that protesters would be caned made clear the sort of atmosphere that would surround these meetings.”

While 163 organizations have formally endorsed the boycott, a number of other organizations are supporting the effort in different ways. Many civil society groups not on the list of endorsers, for example, have cancelled meetings that had been scheduled with the IMF and World Bank.

“The World Bank and IMF cannot escape their complicity in this draconian crackdown,” said Shalmali Guttal of the pan-Asian organization Focus on the Global South. “Not only did they knowingly choose Singapore, but Singapore’s attitudes perfectly reflect the global economic system they impose and oversee -- one that benefits a few elites while condemning millions to the everyday structural violence of poverty. Dissent and civil rights threaten elite control. Indeed, World Bank and IMF support for despotic regimes has a long, sordid history, and includes massive aid to Marcos in the Philippines, Soeharto in Indonesia and Mobutu in Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo).”

Despite the Singapore government’s efforts to cancel it, the International People’s Forum Against the World Bank and IMF opens today at the Asrama Haji Center in Batam, Indonesia and continues through the 17th.