

Non-Aligned Movement joins call for crisis coordination

By Elisa Barwick

On 4 May, 40 heads of state of Asian, African, European and South American nations held a virtual summit of the Non-Aligned Movement's (NAM) Contact Group to discuss coordination in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This follows the 28 April online summit of BRICS nations which urged cooperation rather than geopolitical blame-games in order to effectively overcome the crisis. ("BRICS bloc weighs in on shaping post-COVID world", AAS, 6 May 2020). Both groups insisted that the spirit of mutual cooperation for mutual benefit in a multilateral rather than unilateral world order, must characterise international relations during and in the wake of the crisis.

The summit, under the banner "United against COVID-19", was hosted by the current chair of the NAM, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and included UN Secretary General António Guterres, Director of the World Health Organisation Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, foreign policy chief of the European Union Josep Borrell, and the other NAM Contact Group members.

The declaration released by the group reiterated its strong commitment to the UN Charter; called for global solidarity and international cooperation to "ensure global access to medicines, vaccines and medical equipment to face COVID-19"; recognised the severe economic disruption caused by the pandemic, especially affecting the poor and vulnerable, and urged economic cooperation; reiterated its commitment to "preserving and strengthening the values of multilateralism and international cooperation" towards ensuring peace and security, development and human rights; condemned the use of unilateral coercive sanctions levied against several countries, which violate the UN charter and international law; and called for intensified scientific cooperation internationally to defeat the pandemic. The declaration emphasised "that in the face of this type of global emergency, the spirit of solidarity must be at the centre of our efforts and a high level of ethical and humanitarian commitment is required, where solidarity and selfless cooperation prevail in order to provide the peoples in need with medicines, medical equipment and supplies, food, exchange of expertise and good practices."

A NAM Task Force was established, which among other tasks will create a database of "basic humanitarian and medical needs and requirements of NAM Member States, which will be submitted by the Chairmanship to all donor countries, international humanitarian organisations, international financial institutions, transnational private entities implementing social responsibility projects and others for possible support and assistance".

History of the NAM

The Non-Aligned Movement is a group of 120 developing nations which have refused to align with or against any major power or bloc since the Cold War. The largest forum of nations apart from the United Nations, it was founded in 1961 by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indonesian President Sukarno, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito and President of Ghana Kwame Nkrumah. The idea first arose in discussion about rising tensions between the USA and USSR at the 1955 Asia-Africa Bandung Conference in Indonesia. Today it includes most African and Asian and many South American nations. There are 17 observer states, including China and Brazil, and 10 observer organisations.

NAM nations seek to "create an independent path in



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the NAM forum by video conference. Photo: Twitter/Modi

world politics that would not result in member States becoming pawns in the struggles between the major powers", achieve sovereignty and self-determination, fight against imperialism and neo-colonialism, exercise moderation, and to restructure the international economic order so nations can engage internationally on an equal footing.

President Tito opened the 1961 Belgrade summit which launched the movement by affirming that it was the duty of the assembled nations to help the great powers "find a way out of the present situation and prevent the outbreak of a new military conflict". At conclusion of the meeting a single letter was drafted, to be sent to the leaders of both the USA, President John F. Kennedy, and the USSR, Premier Nikita Khrushchev. It was signed by all 25 heads of state present. The letter could be re-issued almost word for word today. It stated that the nations were "distressed and deeply concerned at the deterioration in the international situation and the prospect of war which now threatens humanity." The nations urged the "Great Powers" to resume negotiations "so that the danger of war might be removed from the world and mankind adopt ways of peace". The letter concluded: "In particular, we earnestly request for direct negotiations between Your Excellency and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, who represent the two most powerful nations today and in whose hands lies the key to peace and war. We feel convinced that devoted as both of you are to world peace, your efforts through persistent negotiations will lead to a way out of the present impasse and enable the world and humanity to work and live for prosperity and peace."

Australia should adopt the principles of the NAM!

The criteria for NAM membership include:

- The country should have adopted an independent policy based on the coexistence of States with different political and social systems and on non-alignment or should be showing a trend in favour of such a policy;
- The country concerned should be consistently supporting the Movements for national independence;
- The country should not be a member of a multilateral military alliance concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts;
- If a country has a bilateral military agreement with a Great Power, or is a member of a regional defence pact, the agreement or pact should not be one deliberately concluded in the context of Great Power conflicts;
- If it has conceded military bases to a Foreign Power the concession should not have been made in the context of Great Power conflicts.

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