

Join the Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement (GAAM)!

By Anita Pleumarom*, March 2015

An alliance of environmental and climate justice campaigners, aviation and tourism critics, and human rights activists have formed the Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement (GAAM) to raise public awareness and to take action on socially and ecologically harmful mega-airport development projects.

So-called 'airport city' or 'aerotropolis' schemes have been spreading rapidly across the globe in recent years. Even though the immense social, environmental and climate impacts of aviation have been widely recognized, new projects are being announced almost on a daily basis.

The aerotropolis comes as a giant 'development' package that includes – among others – an airport and other hardware infrastructure (highways, railways, ports, etc); luxury hotels; shopping and entertainment facilities; convention, trade and exhibition complexes; golf courses and sport stadiums; and industrial parks.

The promoters of aerotropolis point out the glamour of a new dynamic urban form that is “economically efficient, globally competitive, attractive, and sustainable”, according to John Kasarda, the most renowned aerotropolis designer. There is the promise of creating powerful engines of local economic development, attracting aviation- and tourism-linked investors, generating jobs for locals and permitting modernization and added value for the surrounding communities.

However, what is paraded as benign and forward-looking airport-plus-urban/commercial development is in reality a nightmare for many local communities as well as environmental and social justice activists. Those who benefit from aerotropolis projects are not locals, but first and foremost transnational corporations – including construction firms, airlines and other transport companies, hotel chains, real estate companies, consultancies, large-scale retail businesses, the security equipment companies, consultancies and financial institutions. Aerotropolis caters for a small privileged minority of clientele - a hypermobile, frequent-flyer elite that cultivates an obscenely consumeristic and unsustainable lifestyle.

These mega-airport “development” packages involve extremely high economic, social and environmental costs and cause havoc particularly in developing countries with weak democratic structures and law enforcement. Major problems are forceful evictions; dispossession of the people's access to land, water and other resources; loss of biodiversity and farmland; environmental degradation and pollution; lack of transparency and accountability. In the light of this, it is most troublesome that often scarce government funds and overseas development assistance are being used for the promotion and establishment of such controversial projects.

In conclusion, aerotropolis are damaging, wasteful and exploitative in nature, and they violate human rights in every sense of the word. Therefore, it is not surprising that resistance against such projects has been growing worldwide - from United Kingdom and Turkey, to Tanzania in Africa, India and Taiwan in Asia, to Mexico in Latin America.

The Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement's (GAAM) endeavor will be to:

- Support local struggles and strengthen the international 'campaign community' against damaging aerotropolis projects; for example, by amplifying the people's voices, and naming and shaming perpetrators who are directly and indirectly involved in project-related human rights violations, social injustices, environmental crimes, corruption and other illegal and unethical practices (e.g. investors and shareholders, government bodies and politicians, development agencies, consultants);
- Research, monitor and document aerotropolis developments, highlighting issues such as:
 - >>land acquisition for projects and related displacements, social injustices, human rights violations (with special consideration for Indigenous Peoples and women);
 - >> economic implications for surrounding communities (cost-benefit analysis from the local perspective, growing inequality);
 - >> environmental and climate impacts (deforestation, loss of biodiversity, wildlife, farmland, pollution);
 - >> aerotropolis as speculative property development;
 - >> aerotropolis as a driver of consumeristic and unsustainable lifestyle;
 - >> aerotropolis as gated and heavily militarized areas, where people are under total surveillance and enjoy no democratic rights; deepening social segregation: no access for poor and unwanted people (e.g. migrants);
- Raise public awareness and foster debate, e.g. by writing articles, using websites and the social media, making presentations at conferences, and by engaging in symbolic action (protest rallies, exhibitions, arts festivals)

The Global Anti-Aerotropolis Movement (GAAM) is connecting all the people, organizations and networks around the world that want to see destructive, wasteful and exploitative mega-airport developments stopped.

Please join GAAM and give active support to our actions!

You may sign up as individual or as an organization; both are important to a collective impact of GAAM.

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GAAM co-founders are:

AirportWatch, U.K.

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Pastoralists Indigenous NGO's (PINGO'S Forum), Tanzania

Rose Bridger, U.K., author of the book 'Plane Truth'

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