



Venezuela Solidarity Network

June 2, 2006

Interim Steering Committee

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Alliance for Global Justice
Anti-War Committee in Minneapolis
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US Cuba Labor Exchange
US Peace Council
US/Cuba Labor Exchange
Young Socialists

Bono (of U2)
c/o Principle Management
250 West 57th Street
New York, New York 10019

Dear Bono,

On the "Hearts & Minds" page of your website, you open with an appeal to others with a quote from Mahatma Gandhi, "We must become the change we want to see in the world." Your appeal goes on to highlight the many philanthropic efforts of U2 over the years. These have included benefit concerts and other worldwide campaigns for issues such as human rights, sustainability, debt reduction, AIDS, poverty, disease, militarism, and political oppression.

Given this background, many people around the world have been shocked to find out that you are a part owner, through Elevation Partners, of Pandemic/Bioware, producers of "Mercenaries 2".

As you must know, "Mercenaries 2" is a war game that simulates the invasion of Venezuela in the year 2007. Of course, at this point, we have only been able to see the web-based sample of the game. However, even this is enough to see that the game is designed to demean the Venezuelan people, to undermine the democratically elected government of Venezuela, and to strike fear in the hearts of ordinary Venezuelan citizens who, through this game, can witness their very neighborhoods, villages, and capital being blown up and their virtual selves being massacred by a band of marauding mercenaries, who are clearly working for foreign interests who want to take control of the country's oil industry. Please note that in one of the scenes in downtown Caracas one of the buildings being blown up belongs to the state-owned Petroleos de Venezuela. This building is amongst a group of easily recognizable residential buildings, in which it is presumed thousands of innocent people are being burned alive. You may also want to note that this oil company (PDVSA), which owns CITGO, is the only oil company to offer discounted heating oil to residents of poor neighborhoods in the United States.

We have family and friends in Venezuela and many of us have walked and stayed in the places featured in the war game. To us, these are not just clever abstract pictures. They are scenes of a place we consider our second home. Please try to imagine how Venezuelans must feel viewing a bulky, blonde, military man laying waste to their country, a country that is finally rising above a 500-year history of oppression and exploitation by foreign powers. To them, this game is simply another sign of the racist, interventionist, arrogant, and uncaring attitude of the United States and Europe toward Venezuela.

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Clearly, this issue goes beyond Venezuela. As you know, your company, Pandemic, has developed video games with military applications for the Pentagon and the CIA. "Full Spectrum Warrior" is one example of this. "Mercenaries 2" is obviously an offshoot of this Pentagon/CIA funded development. Here is a web reference about this: <http://msnbc.msn.com/id/3131181#storyContinued>.

In addition to the concerns we have expressed, it seems that you would want to give some consideration to how this "game" will be received by people in Venezuela, Latin America, and throughout the world. We can only imagine that the general impression will be very negative and this negativity will reflect on you and on U2. Is there any "upside" to the release of this game, other than some short-term profits in the U.S. and European markets?

Potentially, all of the work you have done for the causes mentioned on your "Hearts & Minds" page could suffer because of your association and ownership of this game.

One would think that you might also give consideration to how this video game, like many others, may be used as a recruiting tool. The game is targeted to teenage and 20-something males, the same target market for military recruiting. Bono, are you now joining the recruiting efforts of the U.S. military?

In addition to impressionable young people who may be stimulated by this to join the military or become mercenaries, it is clear that another side effect of such a game is that it contributes to the process of desensitizing people to the horrific violence of war. In the case of "Mercenaries 2," it also could help people rationalize the invasion of countries by the United States and its allies for the sake of controlling natural resources. Given your "public persona," it is hard to imagine that you think this is a good thing.

We realize that for you this may seem like a smart investment and you may not even be aware of the nature of this video game. That said, on behalf of reasonable people everywhere, we appeal to you to re-think your association with this game and your ownership of this company. Please take steps to stop the release of this game.

Our hope, and that of many, is that you will do the right thing and stop the release of this virtual rape and devastation of a small, developing country. Would you see fit to release a version of this game set in South Africa, Haiti, or Ireland?

If that would be objectionable to you, then why are you singling out Venezuela? One can only conclude that there are motives beyond the immediate profit that may be gained by selling the game.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and we would appreciate a response.

Sincerely,

Chuck Kaufman
Actions/Emergency Response Committee