

# **Towards a New Politics**

What Future for the World Social Forum?



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## **What Future for the World Social Forum?**

Francisco Whitaker Ferreira



VASUDHAIVA KUTUMBAKAM

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I dedicate this book to my granddaughters and grandsons,  
Julia, Maria, Lucas, Luiz, Pablo, Helena and Daniel  
and, in them, to all the children in the world,  
in the hope that when they, in their time, join our struggle, the peoples  
of the Earth will be at a threshold closer to the 'other possible world'.



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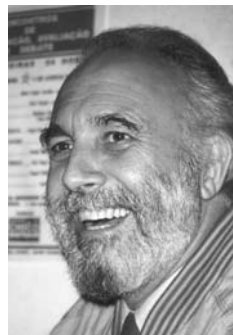


**Chico Whitaker (2006)**

*Brazil—(Honorary Award)*

*‘...for a lifetime’s dedicated work for social justice that has strengthened democracy in Brazil and helped give birth to the World Social Forum, showing that “another world is possible.”’*

Francisco (‘Chico’) Whitaker Ferreira is a Roman Catholic activist, who has worked for democracy and against corruption throughout his life, both at home and in exile. He is one of the key people behind the burgeoning World Social Forum.



### **EARLY CAREER AND EXILE**

Chico Whitaker was born in 1931 and received his diploma in architecture and urban planning in 1957. He left architecture school to participate in research on the standard of living of the inhabitants of São Paulo at the Research Institute SAGMACS. Whitaker joined the Planning Office of the State Government of São Paulo and became, in 1963, the director of planning for the Federal Government’s Land Reform Superintendence, SUPRA. He left this function with the military coup in 1964, joining the opposition to the regime. During

1965-66 he could still work in Brazil, as planning advisor of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). But at the end of 1966 the military forced him into exile with his wife Stella and their four children.

During 15 years abroad, Whitaker initially lived in France, where he worked as a teacher in the training of Third World public servants, as researcher and as UNESCO consultant. He also worked in Chile for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America for four years, and lived through the overthrow of Allende. When returning to France after his stay in Chile, he coordinated in Paris, during six years, the 'International Study Days for a Society overcoming Domination', launched by the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops with the support of four other Bishops Conferences and the International Commission of Jurists. This project facilitated the exchange of experiences among people fighting in 100 countries against all types of oppression.

#### **WORK FOR DEMOCRACY AND AGAINST CORRUPTION IN BRAZIL**

Back in Brazil from 1982, Whitaker first worked as political and social affairs advisor to Cardinal Evaristo Arns in São Paulo. He was one of the founders of the São Paulo Association for Solidarity in Unemployment and, always with his wife, was one of the main activists in organising the popular participation process during the drafting of the Brazilian constitution: The 'Plenaries for popular participation', created all over the country for this purpose, presented 122 amendments to the Constitution project, with 12 million citizen signatures.

From 1989 to 1996, Whitaker was elected twice as local councillor in São Paulo for the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT). In 1996 he left this function to return to work with civil society. He remained a member of the PT until early 2006, resigning when he considered the party was no more faithful to the principles of its foundation.

As Executive Secretary to the CNBB's Commission of Justice and Peace (CBJP) Whitaker both conceived the idea, and was instrumental in the implementation, of a Bill of Popular Initiative: One million signatures were collected against electoral corruption, and particularly the purchase of votes. The Bill was approved by Congress in 1999. Whitaker sits as the CBJP's representative on the National Committee of the Movement Against Electoral Corruption, created after the approval of the Bill, which involves more than twenty of the major national civil



society organisations in Brazil. The Bill has already had great impact: Since the first election respecting it, in 2000, more than 400 mayors, deputies and councillors, who were found to have been involved in electoral corruption, have lost their mandates.

### **THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM**

In 2000 Whitaker was one of those who conceived the idea of the World Social Forum (WSF) and played a key role in bringing it to realisation. The idea was to hold a large conference event, a parallel to the World Economic Forum in Davos, to share the various insights of those from around the world who were working for alternatives to ‘world domination by capital, within the parameters of neoliberalism.’ The slogan was ‘Another World is Possible’. The idea was taken forward by eight leading Brazilian organisations, operating by consensus.

The first World Social Forum was held in 2001 in the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil, attracting 4,000 delegates and 16,000 individual participants from many countries—far more than the organisers had anticipated. People came from Porto Alegre and other places in Brazil and neighbouring countries, as well as from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. It was such a success, that a second event was held in 2002, attended by 15,000 delegates representing 4,909 organisations and movements in 131 countries, with another 35,000 ‘non-delegate’ participants. During 2002 several regional or national forums were organised in all continents, and a World Social Forum took place again in Porto Alegre in 2003, with 100,000 participants. That year also saw the first Asian Social Forum being organised in Hyderabad. In January 2004, the WSF itself moved to Mumbai, and attracted 120,000 to take part. In 2005 the WSF was back in Porto Alegre, with 150,000 participants, and in 2006 was decentralised in three regions of the world: Mali, Caracas and Karachi. The 2007 WSF will be in Nairobi.

From the beginning, the Forums have been much more than just meeting places. They have become platforms for civil society organisations from all around the world to exchange views, form coalitions, work on concrete strategies and coordinate campaigns.

The success is explained by Whitaker by the principles adopted to organise the Forums: horizontality, non-directivity, respect of diversity, no spokespersons, no final document or orientations, self-organisation of the participants’ activities in the forums. These were defined in 2001

after the success of the first Forum, in a Charter of Principles, which is now the sole criterion for participating in the Forum events. It provides for anyone to take part, except government representatives, military organisations and political parties.

### **QUOTES**

Whitaker wrote for a French publication for the 2003 World Social Forum:

*'Porto Alegre is not a "summit of grassroots organisations" nor is it a world congress of a new international movement, but rather a free-form context designed for encounters to enable mutual recognition and learning, which respects all individualities. The Forum brings together delegates from social organisations that are striving the world over to build a world centred on people instead of on accumulating wealth. Today the Forum's organisers are certain they are on the right track to helping citizens rid themselves of their feeling of powerlessness.'*

Liberation Theology, the inspiration underlying Whitaker's life's work, is the radical Catholic theology, which—as he puts it—says that

*'true religion, especially Christianity, basically means working for the upliftment of the poor, fighting for their rights and against the exploitation of the have-nots by the haves.'*

### **PUBLICATIONS**

A book written by Whitaker in 2005, 'The challenge of the World Social Forum', has been published in Portuguese, Spanish, Italian and French. Editions in English, German and several Indian and Kenyan languages are on the way.

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## An Interview with Chico Whitaker

*Ole von Uexkull*

Q: *You have worked your entire life for the democratisation of Brazil. Are you hopeful about the situation today?*

A: We have lived, in last century in Brazil, two long periods of dictatorship: from 1930 to 1945 and from 1964 to 1980. Each time, when we have again a period of democracy, we must re-learn how it functions. Many distortions remain, and people take a good bit of time to believe in the possibility of solving our problems through the democratic institutions. And we have a lot of problems to solve. Our country is champion in social inequality. And democratisation is not only guaranteeing political rights, elections, etc, but especially the right for all to live with dignity. Nearly half of the Brazilians are still half-citizens: the Constitution guarantees to them all these rights but they don't even know they have these rights...

Democratisation is really a long process. In between new problems appear, like now, for example, with a big corrosion in the credibility of the parliament because of corruption scandals. I am nevertheless hopeful because we are progressing. Slowly, but progressing. If political parties are in crisis, civil society begins to emerge as a political actor with more autonomy. We have very much to do, but there are much more people than we can imagine wanting to change things. If we arrive to define strategic objectives of change, we will go more quickly.

Q: *You quit the workers' party (PT) earlier this year. Why?*

A: This is also a long history. When I returned from exile in 1981 the PT was starting to get organised. With people having many dreams. It was

really a new type of party, in its way of functioning and in its composition. It attracted effectively the poor of the country, giving them the opportunity to play a political role in the fight for equality and justice. The respect of ethical principles was also essential in its practice, in a country where corruption is nearly endemic and enters everywhere. But as the party entered in the electoral process and began to conquer positions in the administration, pragmatism—all means are good—to conquer the power became dominant inside the party. I saw this tendency arriving already ten or fifteen years ago, when I was elected councillor in São Paulo. As the party won the Presidency of the Republic, these distortions exploded, changing it entirely. It became only one more party among the others. Many of us—nearly half of its members—decided to work in the re-foundation of the party. Myself, as I had always worked with popular participation and civil society organising, I thought I could be more useful in this type of work, outside any party.

Q: *You were in Paris with Oded Grajew when he conceived the idea of the World Social Forum in January 2000. What did it take to make this idea come real?*

A: Returning to Brazil, we presented the idea to others, coming from various types of work in society. A group of us—from eight different organisations—decided to face the challenge. We deepened the idea of Oded, that we considered brilliant, and from then on we had no more time to stop or to think about what to do. The first Forum was a big surprise also for us. We were expecting 2,500 participants and they were 20,000. We then wrote our Charter of Principles, based on the reasons we identified for this success. From then on, there were still less possibilities to stop. The WSF was a real political invention. And it is now a global process that brings hope to more and more people.

Q: *The slogan of the World Social Forum is 'Another world is possible'. How does this world look like?*

A: Very frequently people ask us this question. I always say to those who ask the question: you know it. The “other” world we would work to build is the utopia of all human beings: peace, justice, dignity of life for all, cooperation and not competition as rule of life, solidarity as main value, no kind of oppression, respect of diversity, no more wars and violence between human beings, respect of the nature to protect our planet and thinking of future generations, etc, etc.

Q: *What about the impact of the World Social Forum? Isn't it just a big fair with little concrete outcomes?*

A: The first big impact is the perspective of hope the Forum opened, encouraging people to rise up to work for a new world. A second impact is in the action of those who come to Social Forums. All those who come—at the world level as well as at the regional, national and local levels—are already working for this or are being invited to do it. When they return home after having experienced the openness and horizontality of the event—when it functions according to our Charter of Principles—they continue their work enriched with the experiences of others they have got to know during the Forum, the exchanges they have experienced, the convergences they have discovered with the struggles of others, the articulations they were able to build to initiate new actions to change the world.

All this makes people feel happy—like in the joyful fairs—also because they discover that it is possible to do politics without having to fight for power, and build a type of unity based on friendship, solidarity and cooperation. As in good networks, not depending on orders coming from above, as in the traditional pyramidal and disciplined political organisations. In this sense many new initiatives in the struggle against neo-liberalism and the domination of money were born in the Forums, and they already have concrete results. But the deepest impact of the Forum will appear in many more years, as its process expands all over the world, rooting itself in all countries and continents, through the regional, national and local forums that are already multiplying everywhere.

Q: *What is your aspiration for the future of the World Social Forum?*

A: My aspiration is this multiplication of Forums all over the world, creating the conditions to overcome the frustrations we had in the attempts to change the logics of economic, social and political life in the XX century. My aspiration is that the Forum becomes really a door opened to hope in a new century free of all types of domination and oppression, for the happiness of mankind.

(September 22, 2006, <http://www.rightlivelihood.org/interviews/chico-whitaker—2006-09-22.htm>)



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## Foreword

*Oded Grajew<sup>1</sup>*

When Chico Whitaker gave me the honour of writing the preface to this book, I thought it a good time to offer a few thoughts that I consider important about the process started by the World Social Forum. Firstly, as to the merit of my having had the idea in February 2000 of setting up the World Social Forum, I do not believe there is any merit in having an idea, because ideas dawn independently of us. What we can do is to give them a chance to surface—for instance, by decontaminating our minds, trying to make room for leisure and idleness, broadening and diversifying our range of interests, making contact with other cultures, cultivating relations and intimacy with our friends, letting ourselves be carried away by fantasies and dreams and opening up to a dialogue between heart and reason.

What also helps ideas to surface is never forgetting that we are endowed with the ability to make choices, that there is never only one path to be followed. At every moment we should be thinking about the possibilities open to us, choosing what to do and what decision to take. Most times, because of the dizzying pace of our daily lives, because of social pressures or because we want to live up to other people's expectations, we do not even stop to think about possibilities and choices. Getting to know ourselves better is fundamental to discovering new possibilities. Our lack of knowledge of ourselves very often leads us to take directions that are not our own.

It was this strategy—of making room for fantasy and dreams in my life, of making contact with other cultures and ways of thinking, of being sustained by the companionship, love and affection of my wife Mara and of thinking about the choices—that led me to think that if there was a World Economic Forum, there should also be a World Social Forum so that everyone could opt between these two world-views, between a

society where people are the tools of economic interests, as just producers and consumers and a society where the economy is a tool for fostering well-being for all and where people are—above all else—citizens. The choice is between competition and solidarity; between war and peace. I believed—and I still do—that the World Social Forum can help people change their mindsets and perceive that we have not arrived at ‘the end of history’, that alternatives do exist, and that the many are exploited by the few because those many are unable to perceive and believe in the alternatives, to organise themselves and to come together for change.

Now, there *is* merit in managing to turn ideas and dreams into reality. Such was the merit of the people and organisations that believed in the idea and—in a short space of time and with scant resources, but with great determination, competence, idealism and creativity—managed to set the World Social Forum process in motion.

Nothing expresses better the emotion that we all felt during the first meeting in January 2001 than the remark from one veteran—a despairing—political militant and old friend of then vice-governor of Rio Grande do Sul State, Miguel Rosseto: ‘Now that I’ve seen the birth of the World Social Forum and taken part in it, I can die happy.’

Now that the World Social Forum process is spreading and consolidating around the globe, I think there are two major challenges ahead of us. The first is to evade the trap that has led many good initiatives to go astray. Many organisations and initiatives started out with a handful of idealistic people with a commitment to noble causes. As they became successful, grew and became prominent actors on the social and political stage, the energies that used to be invested in fulfilling the mission were gradually shifted into maintaining the institution and into a power struggle for controlling the process. Such would be the process of the ‘same world’ that we now want to change.

If we want a world based on solidarity, on respect for diversity, on the promotion of human rights and preservation of the environment, we must set the example by our personal behaviour and our political practice. The ‘other world’ we seek must be built, first of all, in each one of us and in each organisation.

The credibility and the ability to inter-link, lead, persuade and mobilise depends on consistency between discourse and action. Nothing teaches better than the right example, but nothing is more destructive than acting with no respect for people, failing to keep promises and flouting values. The choices between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ worlds are

not just between neo-liberalism and socialism, dictatorship and democracy, war and peace, but also—closer to us in our personal and political circles—between solidarity and competition, loyalty and betrayal, respect and negligence.

Organisations working to bring about social, cultural, political, environmental, spiritual and economic change have employees, collaborators and supporters; they buy products and services, pay taxes and salaries, act in certain physical spaces and they have procedures for administration and governance. They have the opportunity and the duty to apply their world-view, their principles and their values in their day-to-day activities.

The second challenge is to keep the flame burning and energies directed not just to proclaiming our ideas, our plans and desires, but most importantly to actually implementing and constructing another globalisation and another society. Fundamentally important here is not to lose sight of the responsibility we all share to combine our indignation, denunciation, analysis and reflection with the ability and competence to formulate strategies and plans of action and to carry them out. We are, and always will be, what we do and not just what we think, imagine or say. The world is, and always will be, the outcome of actions by people, and that is our greatest challenge because that is what people want and expect.

Once again, if there is merit, it will not be in our ideas, dreams and plans alone, but in our making them a reality. The World Social Forum process, by bringing together thinkers, intellectuals and activists and by connecting people and organisations that embody different cultures and histories has enabled us to build a priceless basis for thinking, planning and liaison, all—I hope—directed to action. It is up to all of us not to disappoint the expectations and hopes rekindled by the World Social Forum.

Finally, I would like to say how important good companions are as we go through life—people who inspire and enrich our search for the meaning of our work, who calibrate our sense of direction, which is indispensable as we move in terrains that we do not know, but so greatly desire. It is they who have made, and continue to make, the World Social Forum what it is, and certainly it is they who will build ‘another world’. They are people like Chico Whitaker, for whom I have profound admiration, great respect and enormous affection. In the course of his life he has built an enormous fund of credibility for the consistency he has

always demonstrated between his political thinking, his world-view and his personal life and actions. Anyone wanting to understand the sort of world we want will certainly find plenty of ingredients by looking at his life and his political background. I regret not having met him earlier in my life and not having had more opportunities to draw on his knowledge and be inspired by his example. His ethical credentials and the depth of his thinking and political action are sure to give readers of this book the true scale of the World Social Forum process. It is a book that will contribute strongly to an understanding of the revolutionary political and social transformation that is under way. It is fundamentally important to revisit and understand the World Social Forum process better so that future decisions and actions really lead us towards a better world.

**NOTE**

1. The idea of organising a World Social Forum was the brainchild of Oded Grajew. For more details, see Annex 2: 'World Social Forum, origins and aims'. Oded is a member of CIVES, the *Associação Brasileira de Empresários pela Cidadania* (Brazilian Association of Business Leaders for Citizenship), which he has represented on the World Social Forum Organising Committee since 2000 and represents today on the World Social Forum International Council.

## Preface

The World Social Forum was held for the first time in January 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It burst on to the political stage at the turn of the century on a wave of protests and mobilisations that had spanned the globe in previous years against the self-proclaimed triumph of neoliberalism. With the assertion, ‘another world is possible’, its proposals quickly gained ground. A series of meetings—large and small, international, regional and local, all organised along the same lines as the Porto Alegre Forum—began to draw increasing numbers of participants, people who were against a capital-dominated world and concerned enough to head-off humankind’s suicidal stampede driven by the logic of capitalism. It thus quickly became the outstanding political initiative of recent times.

Why was it so successful? One possible explanation is that its plan—to embark on forging and advancing proposals—came at the right time. The deeper reason, though, may have been the fact that it permitted experimentation with political practices consistent with the egalitarian and democratic type of society that we want to build. Sweeping in like a fresh breeze, it opened up new horizons. By adopting the horizontal relations of networked structures, it freed political action and brought us back in sight of utopia which rekindled enthusiasm.

If this interpretation is correct, then the role that the Forum wants to play is decisive. It has much to contribute to help society bring social justice, solidarity and peace to prevail everywhere.

In a situation where the entire planet is under domination, it is fundamental that the Forum’s proposals spread worldwide and take root locally everywhere with an urgency equal to the risks facing humankind. Political action must be freed in all countries and as quickly as possible it must be made an effective means to producing change. That is the only

way we will be able to check the trend towards militarisation and terrorism whose violence is designed to combat domination—and that is the only way we can assure the continuation of life on earth.

In this light, the great challenge facing the World Social Forum is to continue providing the service that it has started providing.

The way of looking at the World Social Forum in this book corresponds, in my view, to the political intuitions that its organisers intended to give concrete form to from the outset since the first Forum. It is a view shared—wholly or in part, and with greater or lesser intensity—by many of those who have participated in this collective effort. But it is not the only view possible. The debate must therefore be pursued further, and I hope that this book will contribute to that pursuit.

I hope that this book will also serve to present the World Social Forum to those who have not yet had the opportunity to learn about it. And that for those wanting to join in this great human adventure and who decide to adopt the way of looking at things described here, it will point out ways of organising Social Forums.

The account of the World Social Forum process that I give in this book is also a testimony and like all testimonies, it is given in a personal capacity. Here, in new or old texts, I describe in my own experience the answers I have given in interviews and my narration of episodes that I was present at or participated in. Of course, the history of the Forum includes other episodes that I never knew about and the ones I describe could have been interpreted differently.

My account is therefore necessarily partial. A more complex picture of the process that started with the first Forum in Porto Alegre can only be drawn by collecting the testimonies of those who have joined in the adventure. So let this book also be an invitation for more personal testimonies.

All work is collective, directly or indirectly, over time or in form. This book is the result of an extensive summation of thinking and contributions. As its author, I must offer some special thanks: to Stella, my companion of over nearly 50 years who encouraged me to write it and helped by translating, revising and trying to make it easier to read; to our children, daughter-in-law and sons-in-law, who were always with us in thinking about all the subjects addressed and who did all the work on the computer or—like Celina and Olivier—welcomed us into their home for a first attempt to concentrate on this endeavour; to the many friends and partners that I talk to and work with in organising



the forums or who helped me in researching the documents. I must also thank Fundação Avina, which financed part of the time I spent drafting the text, and Fundação Perseu Abramo and Edições Loyola for their efforts towards having this book released during the 2005 World Social Forum. I hope that this book will be useful to us in our efforts to understand what is happening and to act effectively for building a better world.

**Chico Whitaker**



# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

## 1. THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A NEW WORLD

The World Social Forum could be said—by its very choice of dates<sup>2</sup>—to be an operation in counter-communication<sup>3</sup> against the World Economic Forum. It asserted that the ‘one truth’ thinking of triumphalist capitalism—which brought the lords and masters of the world together in Davos—could be contested by the utopia of ‘another possible world’.

When launching that operation, its organisers went further: they proposed that opposition to neo-liberalism should move forward to a stage centred more on its own proposals. They went even further: in organising the World Social Forum they put into practice a series of political insights drawn from humankind’s experimentation over the preceding decades to free itself from domination of all kinds (see Annex 8, ‘Citizens uprising against the established order’).

That initiative, which attracted social leaders and activist intellectuals as well as grassroots militants from all over the world, helped those insights consolidate and steadily become more precise. Today the World Social Forum performs a series of functions that it alone, with its organisational arrangements can fulfil, giving it special importance on the political stage.<sup>4</sup>

Firstly, The World Social Forum is paving the way for a new political actor—civil society—to emerge or consolidate in each country and at the world level; and by the way in which the forums are organised and held, it is signalling the way to strengthen civil society by setting up horizontal relations among the participating organisations in a process of mutual recognition and learning where they cooperate and inter-connect, instead of competing and disputing hegemony.

Secondly, it is leading us to discover that over and beyond simply contesting, resisting and taking power, changing the world requires a

range of diversified political action; also—and especially—such action must develop in societies from the inside outwards and from the bottom up, with the participation and creativity of all their members on the basis of their concrete needs; such changes are already under way, and there is no need to wait for complete, ideal models of society<sup>5</sup> to be proposed or imposed from the top down; no change will be lasting unless it is accompanied by internal change, from the inside out, in each member of society.

Thirdly, the World Social Forum is making room for people to learn political action that respects diversity and pluralism and that struggles not for power as such, but to exercise it as a service in the certainty that the means we use shape the ends we achieve; it is reminding us that a new world cannot be built with the practices of the old world which is to be supplanted and therefore it is necessary to build a new political culture.

## **2. THE INSTRUMENTAL NATURE OF THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM**

The foregoing enumeration of the functions taken on by the World Social Forum—or more precisely by the process that it has launched—shows clearly that it is not the Forum that is going to build the ‘other possible world’. It will not change the world; society will. The Forum plays an entirely intermediary role in the struggle for change. In order for us to achieve that goal, it makes a specific contribution which is different from those expected of other instruments of political action. That difference characterises it as a means at the service of those instruments.

Accepting the Forum’s intermediary and instrumental nature is, in fact, essential to ensuring its continuance. It cannot be expected to be more than it is, nor be required to take on functions that are not its own. Turning it into a major political force capable of standing up to neo-liberalism will require it to abdicate the functions it now performs and to cease expanding and setting roots around the world.

That is the perspective from which this book talks about the World Social Forum—as a World Social Forum—and about its role in the broader struggle of which it forms a part. It therefore does not offer historical or situational analyses of the strategies of those who today submit the world to their interests, nor analyses of how the capitalist system has evolved, of the conditions for its domination to expand, or the mechanisms it uses to maintain and increase that domination, or its social consequences. Neither does it address forms of resistance and confrontation by those who oppose this system, nor the alternatives that are being

formulated. Nor does it present the contents of the multiple proposals discussed at the forums or the initiatives that are arising out of them.

This book deals solely with the conditions necessary for as many proposals and initiatives towards building the ‘other possible world’ to actually emerge—freely and democratically—by way of the forums.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. ‘LEARNING TO UNLEARN’<sup>7</sup>**

This book is loaded with an optimism that may give the impression that the path of the World Social Forum is an easy one. In fact, for it to perform its proper role is a hard, continuous struggle. The political practices used throughout the last century—and to date—in struggles to overcome the rule of capital<sup>8</sup> are kept alive in people’s minds, hearts and sufferings. To call them ‘old world’ practices may even sound disrespectful towards so many people who have devoted their lives to thinking and acting, often at the cost of personal sacrifice, in an effort to destroy the capitalist monster—often amid the many painful shadows cast during that very process of struggle.

In all that is done it is as if under the table on which ideas are being sketched out on how to organise the World Social Forum or where elbows are rested to listen keenly to other ideas being proposed an enormous octopus is hiding. Nourished by ‘old world’ practices, its long, strong tentacles are continually reappearing on all sides of the table, trying to pull down anything new that we try to create. It seems to be concerned with preventing anything that might weaken it from growing and thriving. Its tentacles re-emerge at every moment, repeating the same manoeuvre a thousand times in new guises.

We have to learn to live with this octopus while trying to curb its appetite or making it less aggressive. We still have much to understand about all that was said and done—both good and bad—in the long struggle of the past century. But if we lower our guard, or give ground here and there, everything will be pulled under the table, undermining it completely until it collapses and we have to turn back.

I hope the octopus will forgive us if we seem ungrateful, but we are practically forced to cut off its tentacles every time they reappear, just as an umbilical cord inexorably has to be cut. The century ended with an accumulation of frustrations and disappointments, and we are morally obliged to surmount whatever may have caused that failure. If the World Social Forum can contribute to giving greater strength and really change-making effectiveness to political action towards a new world,

then we have to defend it permanently from the tentacles of the 'old world'.<sup>9</sup>

What future will the World Social Forum actually have? In answer to an Indian newspaper that asked me this question in December 2003 I said:

I don't know what the future of the World Social Forum will be. But I would like it to go on expanding around the whole world, to go on awakening more and more consciousness, to go on extending the experience of a new political culture, to go on leading to more and more mobilization, concrete initiatives and proposals for changing the world.

Let me round this off with a phrase from Vaclav Havel: 'One fact is undeniable: political change is not the cause of society's awakening, but its final consequence' [7].

#### NOTES

1. Introduction to the book first published in Portuguese, in 2005.
2. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, the World Social Forum was held on the same days as the World Economic Forum in Davos. In 2004, in India, it was held a few days earlier so as not to clash with India Day. In 2005, though it returns to the dates of the Davos Forum. Similarly in 2006, when three Forums will be held simultaneously in Venezuela, Mali and Pakistan, these simultaneous Forums will take places on the same dates as Davos.
3. In a talk to the *Mutirão Nacional de Comunicadores*, organised by the Communication Pastoral of the Brazilian Episcopal Conference (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil*, CNBB) in July 2003 in Salvador, Bahia State, Brazil, I had occasion to state: 'Choosing the same dates (as Davos) for a Forum centred on the human person and no longer on the market was a communication strategy. By virtue of the number of participants it drew—100,000 at the last edition—the WSF was a success in communication.'
4. The Forum's organisers are aware of their limitations and the resulting limitations of the instruments they set up. Amit Sen Gupta and Probir Purkayastha, members of the Organising Committee of the World Social Forum in India, pointed this out clearly in a text written before that Forum was held [2]: 'It is by no means a perfect process. But, perhaps, if we wait for a perfect process to be handed to us on a platter, we shall wait in vain. Let us work with the process to make it more inclusive, more equipped to confront the challenge posed by imperialist globalisation.'
5. These models are what are usually referred to as 'political projects', an issue that journalists particularly always return to, as in the interview I gave to the Brazilian weekly *Caros Amigos* during the 2003 Forum. Question: 'But isn't there a lack of a political project?' My answer: 'Look, journalists always want to know what the concrete proposal is, what the final document is going to be. They don't see that the Forum is a process that leads to other forums around the world, that inter-links networked movements and that goes on growing, as demonstrated by these hundred thousand people who are here today.'

6. In 2004, in an interview to the French magazine *Clark* [4], I was asked: ‘What concretely would this other world you are proposing be like?’ Although simple, my answer had to be long: ‘It is not hard to imagine this new world that we all want. It will be a world of peace—and therefore free from war and violence; of friendship, collaboration and cooperation among people—and therefore free from any competition that may kill or impair; of respectful relations with nature—and therefore free from activities that prey on or destroy the environment and neglect the planet’s future; a world where all those we hold responsible for administering collective assets—politicians—serve those interests and not their own particular interests; a world where everyone—and not just a minority—has enough to eat every day and the means to meet at least their essential needs; a world where our ways of life, and our lives themselves, are neither determined nor manipulated by the interests of money—that instrument of exchange we invented, and that now dominates us; a world free from prejudice, disdain and discrimination by race, religion, culture, gender and so on; a world where people are not dominated by the need to consume and to possess always more and more material goods, but rather where they seek to be better and better people in their dignity and in respect for the dignity of others, surpassing the present concept of wealth and turning to other, less material values; a world where citizens with all their rights are not recast as consumers with different levels of purchasing power; and so on and so on; in short, a world where we can all live without fear, in happiness and in love for one another. That is total utopia, of course. But actually we do all dream of such a world, knowing that it is practically unattainable. Now, if nonetheless we keep alive the hope of being able at least to move towards such a world, changing structures and behaviour step by step—the sweeping changes having shown themselves to be ineffective—or building pieces or islands of that new world within ourselves or around us, that will be really good. We will be happier, we will make others around us a little happier too, and gradually we will get closer to that utopia...’
7. I have borrowed this expression ‘learning to unlearn’ from Alain Bertho, who took part in the Europe Social Forum and in local Social Forums, including one at Saint Denis, France, where he lives. He used it at a workshop at the Local Social Forum of Bures-sur-Yvette, France on 7 February 2004. It describes well the kind of effort required of anyone joining in this process. In fact, for over a century we have been shaped by a view of politics and ways of acting politically that are now being called into question. We have to divest ourselves of old frameworks and habits if we really want to build a new world. We have to learn to unlearn what we have been taught for so long.
8. In a text on the World Social Forum for the 2004 Agenda Latino-Americano [5], I reiterated Bertho’s image: ‘Simply taking part in this kind of encounter already is a political action that re-educates, and helps us unlearn what has been taught us for a whole century—or far more than a century...’ In another article written in 2004 for the book *FSE 2003: Crônica de um encontro cidadão* [6], I was even more explicit: ‘In the forums we are invited to re-educate ourselves, in our behaviour and in how we organise our actions, in order to change the world. A new world is not built with the political methods of the world we want to surpass.’
9. In political action it is a delusion to think that you have found the truth. The World Social Forum sets up complex dynamics, which we do not always manage to understand. Even if we are on the right road, we have to keep in mind what Vaclav Havel,

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former President of the Czech Republic used to say of those who, throughout the long political drama his country underwent, were capable of living 'within the truth' and protecting their human dignity. 'Naturally it is difficult to know when and by what invisible paths, full of crossroads, this or that truthful act or position acted on the realities, and how the virus of truth expanded progressively and corroded the tissue of that "living within lies" [7].



## World Social Forum Charter of Principles

*The World Social Forum Charter of Principles is the basic document of the World Social Forum which should be taken as a frame of reference by all social forums to be organised in line with its proposals at whatever level. For this reason this book starts by presenting the Charter as it appears on the Forum's website ([www.forumsocialmundial.org.br](http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br)).*

The committee of Brazilian organisations that conceived of, and organised, the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre from January 25th to 30th, 2001, after evaluating the results of that Forum and the expectations it raised, consider it necessary and legitimate to draw up a Charter of Principles to guide the continued pursuit of that initiative. While the principles contained in this Charter—to be respected by all those who wish to take part in the process and to organise new editions of the World Social Forum—are a consolidation of the decisions that presided over the holding of the Porto Alegre Forum and ensured its success, they extend the reach of those decisions and define orientations that flow from their logic.

1. The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and inter-linking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the earth.
2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localised in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto

Alegre that 'another world is possible', it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.

3. The World Social Forum is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.
4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalisation commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens—men and women—of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.
5. The World Social Forum brings together and inter-links only organisations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but intends not to be a body representing world civil society.
6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No one, therefore, will be authorised, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for inter-relation and action by the organisations and movements that participate in it.
7. Nonetheless, organisations or groups of organisations that participate in the Forum's meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its disposal, without directing, hierarchising, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organisations or groups of organisations that made the decisions.

8. The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralised fashion, inter-relates organisations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.
9. The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organisations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organisations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.
10. The World Social Forum is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.
11. As a forum for debate, the World Social Forum is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality that the process of capitalist globalisation with its racist, sexist and environmentally destructive dimensions is creating internationally and within countries.
12. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organisations and movements, and places special value on the exchange among them, particularly on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, in the present and for future generations.
13. As a context for inter-relations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among

organisations and movements of society, that—in both public and private life—will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanisation the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanising measures being taken by the action of these movements and organisations.

14. The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organisations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking active participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity.

*Approved and adopted in São Paulo, on April 9 2001, by the organisations that make up the World Social Forum Organising Committee, approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10 2001.*