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WSF 2004: Call of the Social Movements and Mass Organisations
Mumbai, India, January 2004

We the social movements united in Assembly in the city of Mumbai, India, share the struggles of the people of India and all Asians. We reiterate our opposition to the neoliberal system which generates economic, social and environmental crises and produces war. Our mobilisation against war and deep social and economic injustices has served to reveal the true face of neoliberalism.

We are united here to organise the resistance against capitalism and to find alternatives. Our resistance began in Chiapas, Seattle and Genoa, and led to a massive world-wide mobilisation against the war in Iraq on 15th

February 2003 which condemned the strategy of global, on-going war implemented by the United States government and its Allies. It is this resistance that led to the victory over the WTO in Cancun.

The occupation of Iraq showed the whole world the existing links between militarism and the economic domination of the multinational corporations. Moreover, it also justified the reasons for our mobilisation.

As social movements and mass organisations, we reaffirm our commitment to fight neoliberal globalisation, imperialism, war, racism, the caste system, cultural imperialism, poverty, patriarchy, and all forms of discrimination - economic social, political, ethnic, gender, sexual.

We are also against all kinds of discrimination to persons with different capacities and fatal illnesses such as AIDS.

We struggle for social justice, access to natural resources – land, water and seeds- human and citizens' rights, participative democracy, the rights of workers of both genders as guaranteed in international treaties, womens' rights, and also the people's right to self-determination. We are partisans of peace, international cooperation and we promote sustainable societies that are able to guarantee access to public services and basic goods. At the same time, we reject social and patriarchal violence against women. We call for a mass mobilisation on 8th March, International Women's Day.

We fight all forms of terrorism, including state terrorism. At the same time we are opposed to the use of terrorism which criminalises popular movements and restricts civil activists. The so-called law against terrorism restricts civil rights and democratic freedom all over the world.

We vindicate the struggle of peasants, workers, popular urban movements and all people under threat of losing their homes, jobs, land or their rights. We also vindicate the struggle to reverse privatisation in order to protect common, public goods, as is happening with pensions and Social Security in Europe. The victory of the massive mobilisation of the Bolivian people in defense of their natural resources, democracy and sovereignty testifies to the strength and potential of our movements. Simultaneously, peasants across the globe are struggling against multinationals and neo-liberal corporate agricultural policies, demanding sovereignty over food and democratic land reform. We call for

unity with all peasants on 17th April, International Day of Peasants Struggles.

We identify with the struggle of the mass movements and popular organisations in India, and together with them, we condemn the political and ideological forces which promote violence, sectarianism, exclusion and nationalism based on religion and ethnicity. We condemn the threats, arrests, torture and assassinations of social activists who organised communities in order to struggle for global justice. We also denounce discrimination based on caste, class, religion, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity. We condemn the perpetuation of violence and oppression against women through cultural, religious and traditional discriminatory practices.

We support the efforts of mass movements and popular organisations in India and Asia which promote the struggle for justice, equality and human rights, especially that of the Dalits, Adivasis, and the most oppressed and repressed sectors of society. The neoliberal policy of the Indian government aggravated the marginalisation and social oppression which the Dalits have suffered historically.

For all these reasons we support the struggle of all the marginalised throughout the world, and urge everyone worldwide to join the call of the Dalits for a day of mobilisation for social inclusion. As an escape from its crisis of legitimacy, global capitalism is using force and war in order to maintain an anti-popular order. We demand that the governments put a stop to militarism, war, and military spending, and demand the closure of US military bases because they are a

risk and threat to humanity and life on earth. We have to follow the example of the people of Puerto Rico who forced the US to close its base in Vieques. The opposition to global warfare remains our main object of mobilisation around the world.

We call on all citizens of the world to mobilise simultaneously on 20th March in an international day of protest against war and the occupation of Iraq imposed by the United States, Great Britain and the Allied Forces.

In each country, the anti-war movements are developing their own consensus and tactics in order to guarantee as wide a participation and mobilisation as possible. We demand the immediate withdrawal of all occupying troops and support the right of the Iraqi to self-determination and sovereignty, as well as their right to reparation for all the damages caused by the embargo and war.

The struggle against terrorism not only acts as a pretext for continuing the war and occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, but it is also being used to threaten and attack the global community. At the same time, the US is maintaining a criminal embargo against Cuba, and destabilising Venezuela.

We call upon all people to give maximum support this year to the mobilisation for the Palestinian people, especially on 30th March, Palestinian Land Day, against the building of the wall of apartheid. We denounce imperialist forces that are generating religious, ethnic, racial and tribal conflicts in order to further their own interests, increasing the suffering of the people and multiplying the hate and violence between them. More than 80 per cent of the ongoing conflicts in

the world are internal and especially affect African and Asian communities.

We denounce the unsustainable situation of debt in poor countries of the world, and the coercive use by governments, multinational corporations and international financial institutions. We strongly demand the total and unconditional cancellation and rejection of the illegitimate debts of the Third World. As a preliminary condition for the satisfaction of the fundamental economic, social, cultural and political rights, we also demand the restitution of the longstanding plunder of the Third World. We especially support the struggle of the African peoples and their social movements.

Once again we raise our voices against the G8 Summit and the meetings of the IMF and World Bank, who bear the greatest responsibility for the plunder of entire communities. We reject the imposition of regional and bilateral free-trade agreements such as FTAA, NAFTA, CAFTA, AGOA, NEPAD, Euro-Med, AFTA and ASEAN.

We are millions of persons united in the struggle against our common enemy: the WTO. The indigenous people are struggling against patents on all kinds of life-forms and the theft of biodiversity, water, land. We are united in fighting the privatisation of public services and common goods.

We call upon everybody to mobilise for the right to water as a source of life that cannot be privatised. We are endeavouring to recover control over public common goods and natural resources, previously privatised and given to transnational enterprises and the private sector. In the victory at Cancun, the death of Lee symbolised the suffering of millions of peasants

and poor people all over the world that are excluded by the "free market". His immolation is a symbol for our struggle against the WTO. This proves our determination to oppose any attempt to revive the WTO.

WTO out of agriculture, food, health, water, education, natural resources and common goods!

With this determination in mind, we call upon all the social movement and mass organisations of the world to join the mobilisation in Hong Kong or in any other place where the WTO ministerial will be held. Let us join our efforts to struggle against privatisation, in defense of common goods, environment, agriculture, water, health, public services and education.

In order to achieve our objectives, we reiterate our strong desire to reinforce the network of social movements and our capacity for struggle.

Globalise the struggle! Globalise the hope!

Dark Spots Come out in 'Shining India'

Praful Bidwai

The World Social Forum, held in the Indian city of Mumbai between January 16 and 21, could not have been convened at a more different place from Porto Alegre in Brazil, its venue for the three years since 2001.

Porto Alegre is in a province of Brazil ruled by the progressive Workers' Party, as much a forward-looking popular social movement as a political organisation contesting elections, whose leader is now that country's president.

Mumbai is in Maharashtra state, ruled by a rickety semi-conservative alliance

uncertain of its own future and its links with the people.

Porto Alegre has been the site of bold experiments in community-controlled development and participatory democracy, in which equality is a major theme.

Mumbai is a city of ugly contrasts between the filthy rich and the wretchedly poor, which has given up on the ideal of building a relatively equitable, shared community in which there is social opportunity for all.

Mumbai, India's financial capital, with its gleaming chrome-and-glass buildings in affluent enclaves, generates more than a fourth of the country's direct tax revenue.

But two-thirds of Mumbai's people live in indescribably dirty shantytowns, where there are no water taps or toilets in most homes. The people's present is sordid, their future bleak. Mumbai in some ways is a microcosm of India, although its urban existence bears sharp contrast to the rest of the country, 70 percent of which is rural.

Yet Mumbai contains a concentrated expression of India's many contradictions--globalisation-led warped and uneven development, vicious and growing gender inequalities, growing crime and social insecurity, collapse of public services and the rule of law, massive corruption and a hollowing out of democracy.

Mumbai's -- and India's -- reality gives the lie to the Indian government's claim that globalisation, along with privatisation and deregulation, has transformed the conditions of life of the people for the better and holds the key to genuine development and progress.

The government, the most right-wing in independent India's history, has been tom-toming the achievements of its neoliberal economic policies through a series of expensive and lurid advertisements in print and on television entitled 'India Shining', which have been run in the entire media for two months.

They are part of propaganda by the ruling coalition before a probable early parliamentary election around April. These all celebrate India's "gains" and "brilliant achievements" -- 7 percent growth rate in Gross Domestic Product, rising stock prices, lower interest rates, a boom in information technology, a tripling of the number of cellular phone lines in two years, construction of new highways.

Yet, all these claims are suspect or downright meaningless from the point of view of the people. High share prices carry no relevance for the majority: less than 60 million out of India's one billion people own stocks and shares. Low interest rates are part of a new deflationary regime in India. Along with the gobbling up of precious public assets by foreign institutional investors, deflation is likely to reduce wage incomes, weaken indigenous industrial capabilities, and impoverish the economy.

All of India's new highways are being built as toll roads, which will raise the costs of transportation while unjustly rewarding contractors. The expansion of the cellular phone market, undoubtedly impressive, is taking place at the expense of access of the majority to basic phone lines: less than five out of 100 Indians have a simple land line. Land line rentals and call rates have been jacked up to subsidise cellular lines used by the middle class.

As for the IT boom, India is producing lots of "cyber-coolies", low-wage, sweatshop workers at the lowest end of the value-addition chain. Indian software exports account for less than 3 percent of the global software market.

There are few Indian companies at the high end of value-addition -- despite the success of U.S. nationals of Indian origin in Silicon Valley in the United States. Two sobering thoughts are in order. For all the hype, IT accounts for under 2 percent of India's national income. Likewise, the fastest growing sector within it is the most wretched and undignified of all: call centres, where young people work 12 to 14-hour shifts for 150 U.S. dollars a month -- only to reach a career dead end.

However, what of the claimed high GDP growth? India's average growth rate in the past three years has been its lowest in a decade. It is only this year that growth is estimated to clock 7 percent, largely on account of a good monsoon after two years of drought in parts of the country.

Ironically, more GDP growth means less employment in today's India. The annual GDP growth of five to six percent in the past couple of decades is not producing enough jobs.

India's organised-sector workforce has actually shrunk during each of the past five years. The sector shed 420 000 jobs in 2001-02, and now accounts for just 7 percent of total employment in India. Today, it has 910 000 fewer jobs than in 1997. So much for 'India Shining'!

The fall has not been made up by the unorganised or informal sector, where total employment has risen by a mere 1 percent a year over the past decade.

The population growth rate is almost double this. And the less said about the quality of employment for the 370 million who labour in the informal sector, the better. They work in abysmal conditions, and without minimal security of employment. Over the past 15 years or so, annual employment growth in India has decreased from 2.7 percent to just 1.1 percent. In the past, an additional output of 10 percent meant creating 6.8 percent more jobs. Today, it means only 1.6 new jobs -- a shocking 76 percent decrease.

Rural unemployment is so high even in some prosperous states like Punjab that thousands of young men and women try to smuggle themselves abroad. There are other distressing figures that tell Indian reality better: appalling stagnation in health, nutrition and education indicators.

India now lags behind Bangladesh in primary education access. India's rank in the U.N. Human Development Index has fallen from 124 to 127. There has been a decline in public spending and capital investment.

Growth distribution has been hideously skewed. According to U.N. statistics, 47 percent of Indian children under five are underweight. A quarter of the population is undernourished. And 35 percent live below one dollar a day.

India now spends less per capita on health than it did half a century ago. Public health services are near collapse, even as corporate hospitals boom. Primary education remains elusive for a third of India's children. Thanks to greater military spending, there are severe cutbacks in state funding for schools.

The difference is not made up by the donor agencies. India's military spending has doubled in the last 6 years -- the highest such increase since independence in.

This is of a piece with rising national chauvinism and militarisation of social life and values. When higher GDP means less employment and lower income for most people, horrendous social regression and discontent become likely.

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World Social Forum – The time to act is now

Percy Makombe

The World Social Forum (WSF 2004) was for the first time since its inception in 2001 held in Asia. That the WSF was taken to India in January this year meant that the Forum ceased to be a Latin-American-European Affair. And there are indications that the Forum will head to Africa in 2006. That is as it should be.

For those who believe in numbers, the Forum has not been short of increasing figures. In 2001 it had 20 000 participants, 2002 recorded 50 000, the following year had a whooping 100 000 while this year reports indicate that 150 000 people attended the Forum in India. By any account these are good figures, for when the future of the human race is in jeopardy there is no better way to deal with problems than to start by galvanising public opinion.

Yet the WSF is not just a numbers game for even if only a few hundred people attended its sessions it would still have significance. Nor is the Forum a geographic affair that can just gain legitimacy by being moved from

one region to the other. Nothing beats the WSF as a space for discussion and debate. Nothing rivals the Forum as a space for education. The greatest achievement of the WSF is its ability to articulate the public voice especially in an era when economic globalisation is presented as inevitable.

The WSF has in its short time of existence been able to foster a culture of public debate on divergent issues from democracy, human rights and peace to environment, modernity, gender and trade. It provides an open space for discussing alternatives to neo-liberalism, its slogan proudly proclaims that, "Another World is Possible."

While the curtain was coming down on the WSF, the World Economic Forum (WEF) was beginning its meeting in Davos to strategise on how to further open up markets. WEF has always said that there is no alternative to economic globalisation. Preachers of economic globalisation in WEF believe that the future of the world economy lies in giving transnational corporations a free reign in deciding what is good for national economies.

WEF is assisted in articulating its policies by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. These structures transform WEF policy into action. The World Social Forum has no such structures. In fact, the WSF does not even issue political statements. It is guided by the belief that political action should be the responsibility of individual organisations. It is against this background that organisers of the WSF have shied away from issuing declarations supporting any one political process. Yet no one can stand apart from political action, because

even to say that you are apolitical is to utter a political statement.

The World Social Forum is against neo-liberal policies. It issues clear and unequivocal statements/declarations opposing any programme or action that seeks to promote neo-liberalism. True there are divergent voices in the WSF, but what unites these groups is more than what divides them. Legitimate concerns have been raised about the problems associated with issuing declarations that purport to represent the WSF views. The question has been raised on who has the right to issue a declaration on behalf of WSF's multitude social movements. This is a valid concern and perhaps the way to deal with it is to come up with internal procedures for consensus building. It has also been suggested by others that to be more effective and to help with consensus building, the WSF should become a delegate event. This means that rather than the over 100 000 people who attend the Forum it would be attended by maybe 10 000 people who have been selected by regional forums. It is not going to be an easy thing trying to come up with mechanisms for popular will formation but we must begin from somewhere.

The WSF might not have the benefit of such instruments like IMF, WB and WTO to support its policies, but it has the people. When the peoples of the world stand up for themselves, they can persuade their leaders to take them seriously. The crisis of international capitalism has shown that we need an alternative development paradigm.

Transnational corporations continue to run and manage the international monetary system. This way they are able to define the terms of trade and impose these terms on developing countries generally and Africa in

particular. Thus long term development is ignored and emphasis is shifted to short-term demands of dealing with things like balance of payments. The IMF then comes in and calls for reduction in spending on social services if it is to support the affected country.

Development can never be development if it is not for the people. Where there is no response to people's needs we cannot talk of development. The WSF must continue to expose the fraud in the present international economic system. The current economic system where development is made hostage to free trade is untenable. The way forward for Africa is a gradual and systematic disengagement from the current model of economic order that is driven by purely commercial interests. This disengagement is with a view to re-linking with the rest of the world when Africa is united and stronger. This is long term. In the short term we need to delay the process of further intergration so that we have time to reflect. This means that delaying and even refusing to continue with Cotonou and WTO negotiations. It also means we should only accept external

expertise and resources only when the local is inadequate or does not exist.

The world today is confronted with many problems which have resulted in million conferences and seminars on development. True positive ideas have come from these, but we cannot prevaricate any more. We cannot skirt the issues by trying to be politically correct. The time to act is now. The WSF because of its popular support, massive organisation and intellectual strength can provide the leadership needed to another world. A world where there is justice and equity. A fair world where the concerns of peoples of the world are not subordinated to corporate profits. A world where transnational corporations are not allowed to wreak havoc in peoples lives. As the slogan of the WSF goes: Another World is Possible.

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