

World Social Forum in Nairobi January 20th to 25th 2007
Good news and Sad news

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Sometime, back before it happened, it seemed unrealistic and absurd to imagine it could happen. Who could have imagined the collapse of communism, the bringing down of the Berlin wall and the end of apartheid?

The World Social Forum in Nairobi was a success in many aspects first and foremost by bringing together many social activists. It was an assurance that “another world is possible” though now it might be difficult to imagine it. It might seem unrealistic to imagine a world without exploitation and marginalization, poverty and abuse of human rights. But building from the enthusiasm and passion witnessed from the participants, it is a dream come true.

It is not euphoria for it become clear to me that another world is possible throughout the time of the forum though there is much to be done before this world becomes probable. One cannot dare close his or her eyes or ears from good and sad news aired and the hope expressed in the various workshops of the forum.

Participants noted with great pain the negative growth in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the recent past. The sad news of deteriorating standards of living, poor education and health structures, lack of social services, disease and HIV/AIDS pandemic, the burden of international debt, arms and drug trafficking, issues of refugees, displaced persons and immigrants, food insecurity and lack of clean drinking water, unemployment and the plight of workers. The sad story of the World Social Forum covered socio-economic aspects, socio-cultural aspects and socio-political aspects.

Socio-economic aspects covered issues were exploitation, international debt, unjust trade practices as propagated by IMF, World Bank and WTO, dumping of waste and toxic materials, Structural Adjustment Programs and privatization, unemployment and unjust wages, and food insecurity among others. This was seen to perpetuate crisis in especially Africa hence the continued state of division and tension in most African countries.

Globalization is seen to have no boundaries due to technology, mainly the internet, was ranked highly as a factor destabilizing cultures in the south. It was noted that it is a force that has to be controlled if not to be eliminated. The socio-cultural aspects issues of human rights abuse especially of women, children refugees and immigrants were discussed. It was felt that the south has to build a leadership that borrows from the rest of the world but with the capacity to preserve its character.

Participants in various workshops noted with keen interest the socio-political aspects in the South. It was noted that most African countries took the downward trend in the post colonial Africa. This is a fact difficult to explain due to the immanent nationalism. It was clear that African governments have failed to appropriate the best from their cultures adding to the great pain of loss of identity. This has resulted in poor governance leading to social tensions that are an impediment to growth and progress.

Due to this, Africa has witnessed political disturbance and armed conflicts. Many participants were in favour of forming participatory democracy that will allow room to challenge our elected members of parliament and will do away with total delegation of power to parliamentarians.

The good news is that high hope was witnessed from among the participants. Hope that new world is possible and humanity is not doomed but has alternatives. This strengthened my belief that a world without exploitation, domination, and marginalization and an egalitarian system of allocating resources is possible. The enthusiasm and passion expressed by some of the participants and their belief, the presence of many youths, indicating a good ground for forming future leaders, common voice by participants forming a fertile ground for the formation of genuine and credible coalition and alliances fortified my hope. Hope coupled with the harmonious collaboration of all social actors has the force needed to root out WTO, IMF and World Bank the proponents of capitalism and economic imperialism.

The forum provided the ground needed to mobilize the poor to think and act as one and sensitize all to build the unity required for action required to root out inequality. Gradual implementation of forum's deliberations from the grass root level will assure eradication of poverty by putting in place an alternative economy that has respect of humanity and nature; one that respects property not because of its exchange value but because of its use and value for people.

This calls for an economy with a life approach one as speaker put it. He called it "solidarity economy." It is an economy based on inner change, that is, a revolution of awareness that builds compassion, cares about ethical investment, solidarity with the poor and emancipation of workers, has sense of community and is backed by good governance and the universal unified effort to sustain life where workers share the gains of their work.

Is this possible? Yes it is. The church more than ever is challenged to be what it has to be to the world; be the salt for the earth and the light for the world. This will build actions with a human vision. The church can no longer sit and let the economists and others define for us poverty, development, civilization and democracy. It has to play its role of guiding the world and must always without coercion spread the Gospel.

Thanks to God and to those who made the World Social Forum possible and the organizers. Despite the small problems here and there, it was a success. The challenge to all the participants and people of good will is, are they ready to meet the cost and are they committed to implementing the deliberations of the forum to make it possible for another world? Personal and communal commitment cannot be overemphasized.

Another world is possible, it may be difficult for you to imagine it, if it is hard for you to believe or to imagine, do your best to globalize hope and you will have made another world possible, a world where human dignity is upheld and nature is respected.