

# POSTCARDS FROM PORTO ALEGRE



**Porto Alegre, Brazil**

**23 – 28 Jan 2003**

## **Background to ITDG participation**

The World Social Forum (WSF) facilitates the opportunity for civil society groups to come together to pursue their thinking, to debate ideas democratically, formulate proposals, share their experiences freely and network for effective action. The WSF met for the first time three years ago to stand in opposition to the World Economic Forum in Davos – a forum of OECD countries that advocates and promotes neo-liberal policies the world over.

There are five Thematic Areas at WSF 2003:

- Democratic Sustainable Development
- Principles and values, human rights, diversity and equality
- Media, culture and counter-hegemony
- Political power, civil society and democracy
- Democratic world order, fight against militarism and promoting peace

Each thematic area is conceived as a catalyst of concerns, proposals and strategies that are already being pursued by the organisations participating in the WSF process. Through the WSF, the aim is to give them visibility and, as possible, have them adopted widely by the various actors of civil society that are struggling against neo-liberal globalisation policies.

ITDG is focusing on issues relating to the first two areas. These areas are particularly relevant in the follow-up to the [Forum for Food Sovereignty](#) held in 2002 in Rome in parallel with the [World Food Summit](#). Important actions resulting from that Forum included: Right to Food, Trade, Agroecology and Access to Productive Resources (including Agricultural Biodiversity and Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture). The World Social Forum will take many of these a stage further.

Patrick Mulvany, ITDG's Senior Policy Adviser, is in Porto Alegre and will be filing regular personal reports on what he sees going on. His "Postcards from Porto Alegre" will be posted on this site.

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**World Social Forum III**

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## **Worm's Eye View of WSF**

Patrick Mulvany, ITDG in Porto Alegre

24 Jan 2003

Amid the chaos caused by crashed computers and thus no published venues and timings for around 1,700 workshops, 100,000 people from every corner of the world crowded the streets of Porto Alegre for the opening march of the World Social Forum. In a riot of colours and sounds, the voice of the people was raised in cacophonous harmony in a spirit of renovation asserting that "Another (peaceful) World is Possible".

This is the third Porto Alegre World Social Forum that expresses the diverse demands of Civil Society for peace, justice and equality, held in opposition to the government-dominated Davos World Economic Forum that fixes the economic rules that impoverish the majority.

Although there are high-level objectives, the real strength of the Forum is in its diversity and its ability to create democratic spaces in which civil society organisations and social movements can debate major themes and organise.

For example, from 21 to 23 January, the first Global Assembly of peasant farmers' organisations, organised by Via Campesina, was held. In thematic and regionally-based discussions, important advances in understanding were achieved and demands clarified.

The platform of Via Campesina was strengthened with increased participation by African farmers' and fisherfolk organisations and clear demands, in this year of the Cancun WTO Ministerial meeting, for a radical overhaul of the governance of agriculture and trade in agricultural commodities – calling for agriculture to be taken out of the WTO.

The rights for access to land and waters; freedom from the imposition of genetic engineering and GMOs in agriculture – criticising the Brazilian agriculture minister for suggesting adoption of GM crops; freedom from the restrictions of patents on seeds, and food sovereignty were equally demanded.

The new Brazilian Minister for Land Reform, Miguel Rosetto, addressed the final session and committed the Lula government to a radical programme of land reform implementation that will turn the countryside in all parts of Brazil from violence to justice with dignity.

To a background of music and dance by people of all ages, races and nationalities, and to the chants of "Globalise the Struggle – Globalise Hope", the positive messages of the peasant assembly drew it to a close.

On Friday 24 January, President Ignacio Luis Lula da Silva of Brazil will address 50,000 people in the giant football stadium at the Forum and he will then take its popular energy to 1,000 people at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

Top of ITDG's agenda is the follow-up to the Forum for Food Sovereignty held in 2002 in Rome in parallel with the World Food Summit. The key issues resolved at that Forum were the Right to Food and Food Sovereignty; Priority for Food Sovereignty over Trade; Agroecology as the dominant food production option; and ensuring Access to Productive Resources – land, waters and GM-free and patent-free genetic resources. This World Social Forum widens the opportunities to debate these issues with more civil society organisations and social movements and increase the pressure of demands on global governance structures.

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## **Beneath the surface:** *more from Porto Alegre*

Patrick Mulvany, ITDG

28 January

The Forum is drawing to a close today. Although there is no final declaration as such, the general political consensus about challenging the global institutions that govern the world has grown, widened and deepened as the Social Movements have increasingly united. The top line message is that this alternative process is led increasingly by Social Movements, with NGOs and 'experts' as welcome advisers.

Inclusivity, equity, justice and peace have been key themes in Porto Alegre. And technology has surfaced in various guises from intellectual property rights and genetic engineering to livelihoods and local economies.

Walden Bello, Director of Focus on the Global South who moderated the major theme at the Forum of "Democratic Sustainable Development", with reference to three of the Panel debates which were held in that theme, picked out the issue of technology and society as a key issue. He located it within promotion of localised economies / solidarity economies and environmental management that were unifying topics across hundreds of workshops and discussions at the Forum.

The abuse of genetic engineering technologies has been a dominant sub-theme, here in Rio Grande do Sul, Europe's main supplier of GM-free soya beans. But Monsanto, the developers of GM soya beans, is pushing the new government of the State to licence their transgenic crops. Most people in the State do not want this and Forum participants supported them.

Percy Schmeiser, the inveterate Canadian farmer, who provided witness at the Forum, is the victim of pollution by Monsanto's GM rape seed and yet has, perversely, been found guilty of harbouring their crops on his land without the permission of the polluters, Monsanto. He accompanied Greenpeace activists who, yesterday, unfurled a banner down the side of Monsanto's Porto Alegre offices saying "Monsanto get out of our Food". Schmeiser told me that, as he entered the offices, the Monsanto directors crept out of the back door, "They are cowards" he said.

Brazil's Environment Minister, Marina Silva, confirmed on 27<sup>th</sup> here in Porto Alegre that transgenic GM crops are not allowed in Brazil. "Our government will adopt the Precautionary Principle", she said.

Marina Silva champions the new government's line on removing the social divisions in the world that have created first and second division human beings. President Ignacio Luis Lula da Silva, focused on this theme in his address on 24 Jan to a capacity crowd of more than 70,000 people in an open air arena. It was rapturously received and Lula took the lively energy of the World Social Forum to the chilly climate of the Davos World Economic Forum.

In Davos, he urged the leaders of the rich countries to include the social costs of their actions in future plans and pushed for a fund against poverty and hunger and for social justice to be their dominant concern. Germany responded very warmly and feted him in Berlin, with Chancellor Schroeder promising improved links with Brazil.

Many World Social Forum meetings made it clear that they are not convinced by this attempt to merge the agendas of the Social and Economic Forums. Rather, they believe that now is the time for the world to push ahead with the new Social agenda – one that prioritises social justice over economic growth – before it is too late.

Patrick Mulvany  
Senior Policy Adviser.



## The worm has turned: *World Social Forum challenges US hegemony*

Patrick Mulvany, ITDG, in Porto Alegre

29 January 2003

As the echoes of 40,000 marchers' demands rumble North towards Cancun, participants in this third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre are celebrating the coming of age of a global social movement that is challenging the economic orthodoxies of the powerful. Noam Chomsky said on Monday that the more optimism rises here in Porto Alegre, the more despondent they become in Davos. To the leaders of the crumbling neo-liberal model gathered at the World Economic Forum in Davos, he said "Party time is over!"

Wherever the optimism comes from:

- the figures with 100,000 activists present at the forum including **20763** delegates, representing **5717** organisations from **156** countries and more than **25,000** young people who camped by the river;
- or from the quality of the **1286** official workshops and numerous parallel rallies, conferences, assemblies, panels and testimonies that drew together the world's foremost thinkers and analysts and cemented opposition to inequality, injustice and war;
- or from the unity of realising that the political vision of a more just and equitable world, locally responsive and with democratically accountable institutions can now be achieved;
- or that Brazil has eventually elected a leader of a national social movement as its president who energised a mammoth rally with his commitment to end inequitable policies and violence against the poor and replace them with equality, justice and dignity;

the World Social Forum is established as a new global force.

But to strengthen this position will require more openness and transparency from the organisers, less focus on the Gurus and more on the grassroots, more resolution of differences on policy issues. As Aye Aye Win of the IPS said "Look who's talking. The question of democracy is something we all should address. Which of the world's people elected an NGO to represent them here or anywhere else for that matter. NGOs just sprouted like weeds in a fallow field and proceeded to take over the land." And who are the Social Movements that are championed as the new leaders?

The challenges are significant but as the Forum globalises, the organisers are calling for a broadening of the constituency: "We have to conquer other minds and hearts and show everyone that it is possible to build a better world," said Candido Grzybowski, a member of the World Social Forum's international organising committee. Candido continued more specifically saying that the issues of technology its social control and its role in underpinning the diverse, localised economies that will drive this new world are crucial. "We must start now to prepare for future Forums", he said.

This Forum has been an undoubted success in every dimension, raising global awareness of the parlous state of the world and offering practical solutions. It has united opposition to unjust power and undemocratic institutions. It has raised hope.

Arundathi Roy, the Indian author of the "God of Small Things" in an emotional speech, to more than 15,000 adoring and vociferous participants, that closed the Forum at the final rally on Tuesday said that an impressive achievement of the protest movement is its success at forcing the ambitions of the empire builders out in the open. "We, all of us gathered here, have laid siege to the empire. We have stood up and forced it to drop its mask."

After celebrating the changes in the leadership in Brazil and being drowned out by the chants "Olé, Olé, Olé, Olé, Lula, Lula" Arundathi ended softly to a hushed crowd: "The World Social Forum is coming alive - listen - and on a quiet day you can hear her begin to breathe."

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## Passage to India: *reflections on the World Social Forum's future*

Patrick Mulvany, ITDG

31 January 2003

For three consecutive years Porto Alegre has throbbled to an increasing babel of voices calling for a new world order. The carnival now moves halfway across the globe to India for the fourth World Social Forum. It may be held in Delhi or in the geographically central city of Bhopal of Union Carbide infamy, or possibly Hyderabad the capital of the '2020 vision' State of Andhra Pradesh and the location of the preparatory 2003 Asian Forum, or even Kerala, the south-eastern coastal state whose development achievements, through education, are the envy of the world. The choice will be made in mid February, but, wherever it is, the Indian organisers will have a tough challenge to meet the high expectations generated at this year's Forum in Porto Alegre.

How will India contrast with Brazil and will the agenda change? It will certainly be different, as the Indian writer Arundathi Roy pointed out in Porto Alegre this week. President Lula's inclusive and popular socialist agenda of peace and justice with dignity contrasts with what she called the "neo-fascist religious regime in India that beat 2,000 of its Muslim opponents to death in the recent Gujarati elections."

The social context will be different too. The impact of 320 million hungry, poor people in India - nearly twice the total Brazilian population - causes social tensions that run deeper than those between the *favelas* and the favoured in Brazil.

The spontaneity of the Brazilian temperament may be moderated by more formal Indian cultural values. And the dress code, which has been informal in Porto Alegre, and in the case of young Brazilians, minimal, may have to be replaced by more sober wear.

Environmentally, the context could not be more different. The luxuriant Amazon rainforest, our planetary lung, has huge national relevance and makes environment a key policy issue. In contrast, in India, the once abundant natural resources are now stretched beyond capacity.

But the agenda will not retreat. Indeed the Asia Social Forum in Hyderabad in early January 2003 was emphatic in its rejection of the neo-liberal economic model.

The Forum has reinforced a democratic momentum towards the dismantling of the power structures that impoverish and the reassertion of local sovereignty, rights, equity and justice for the majority. And where better to develop this than in the land where, 60 years ago, one man defeated the Empire – Gandhi lead his people to independence with nothing more than a dhoti, a staff and a principled agenda.

Among these principles, Mahatma Gandhi's crusade for self-reliance, often symbolised by his daily cotton spinning using a Charkha, inspired generations and underpinned the philosophy of Fritz Schumacher, founder of ITDG. Gandhi demonstrated a deep understanding of the relationships of technology with economic development - a theme that recurs in the Forum.



In the hands of the masses technology can enrich them, in the hands of the powerful it will enrich the few. The painful hand-crushing 'punishments' perpetrated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by British soldiers on skilled Indian weavers whose high quality products were seen as a potential threat to the mechanical mills of Manchester, are strong in the folk memory of India. It illustrates the potential of new technologies to corrupt their owners in the drive for technological domination and profits - as true then as today, be they energy or bio-technologies.

Fritz Schumacher, in true Gandhian tradition, called for all technologies to be fitted to the human scale. Underlying Gandhi's notion of village industries was his epigrammatic expression that "the poor of the world cannot be helped by mass production, [but] only production by the masses."<sup>1</sup>

It is this relationship of technology with society that is becoming a dominant theme in development discourse and is being raised in many ways in the World Social Forum: genetic engineering, patents, Intellectual Property Rights, biopiracy, biodiversity, nanotechnologies, corporate power, GM foods, trade, localisation, solidarity economies, to name a few. The latter, local economies, depend on technologies fitted to a local scale and controllable by local communities.

Thus, the "socialisation of technologies", as Walden Bello put it in his summary of the first theme of the Forum "Democratic Sustainable Development", and their democratic control is likely to arise even more pronouncedly in future Forums. Watch this space for news about the development of ideas about Technology and Democracy in preparation for the 2004 Forum in India.

Next year's Forum will be very different, probably smaller on the inside but even larger in its supporting mass rallies. And the issues of poverty, livelihoods, technology, environment and development may be even more prominent in the new Asian context. It will be an opportunity to explore these issues with the wider social movement in a new context and strategise on how to make technologies work with and for the people and in harmony with the environment.

The new venue and the leadership by the social movements could energise the Forum to new heights building on the diversity of views and ideas developed in Porto Alegre. Gandhi recognised the importance of rallying Indian social movements to the cause of local sovereignty, justice and equity and was able to topple the most powerful country in the world through non-violent protest. Can the India World Social Forum in 2004 match this and spark the changes that will make another world truly possible?

Patrick Mulvany  
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<sup>1</sup> Schumacher, E.F. (1973) *Small is Beautiful*, p. 153)