

Neo-Liberal Globalization and People's Alliance

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As we all may agree, the people's alliance has been the key concept to the PP21 processes which we launched in Minamata in 1989. But it appears to me that we have not fully discussed this concept while we have been using it every time we gathered in our major convergences.

Let me look back. In Minamata, we pointed out that global power centers had been constituted imposing destructive consequences of their global designs on the majority of the people, environment, and cultures in the name of "development." This regime that we said we would confront and overcome, a few years later, came to be widely recognized as the neo-liberal globalization regime. In the decade that ensued, WTO came into being, the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union as America's major ideological and geopolitical adversary disappeared, and the United States of America rose to the position of the world's single superpower. Soon the United States set out to establish its "full spectrum dominance" over the global society. That was what happened in the 1990s.

The 2001 September 11 incident has given a finishing touch to this process, emboldening the U.S. to venture to cast the whole world into what may be called an American Empire using anti-terrorism as the new rallying cry. The anti-terrorist alliance, formed under the appallingly arrogant threat of either with us or with the terrorists, has come to embrace most nation states that feel participation in it would benefit their respective unholy self-interests in a variety of ways. I cannot here go even into sketching the post-September 11 situation, but one thing that seems clear is that what we face today is not a passing phase of history conjured by whims and lunacy of an American president, but a renewed historical terrain that substantiates the Orwellian epigram - war is peace, freedom is subjugation, and ignorance is power.

Is PP21-advocated idea of people's alliance still relevant on this terrain and prove to be our source of hope? I think it can if we properly draw lessons from our alliance building work and deliver them to the ongoing people's efforts toward alliance building.

Global people exercising global governance

It should be recalled that in Minamata we posited people's alliance not just as coalitions of people's movements, let alone NGOs, but as the global people who constitute themselves as the sovereign body to exercise global democracy. In Minamata we described the global governance we seek to introduce as transborder participatory democracy. In Thailand in 1992, the Rajchadamnoen Pledge we adopted said, "Alliance of Hope, namely, global people's power which will confront and prevail over the powers of this unjust and unequal world."

Our point of departure, however, was that there was no such "people" as the actually existing sovereign body. As was pointed out in Minamata, they are "divided into various groups positioned differently in the global hierarchical structures, divided by gender, ethnic, religious, geographical, class, cultural, and national borders" while the people's identities are not static, but dynamically changing, overlapping, and mutually interacting. As such "these groups are being forced to live together under conditions imposed upon them." We said that "state-supported global capital is organizing all these groups into a system of international and hierarchical division of labor" and that "this order is lauded as the world of interdependence." Read interdependence globalization. "But it is an interdependence forced upon the people and permeated by hostility and division. The dominant system perpetuates itself by organizing internal division, and setting one people's group against another." We had in mind "national chauvinism, machinated communalism, cultural exclusivism, sexism, and the whole varied panoply of radical ethnic prejudices" that "serve the ruling elites well in their efforts to establish a great organization incapable of its own unity."

The people's alliance we envisioned as the reversal of this neoliberal globalization-forced inter-people relationship. Though people's action has to start on this divided terrain, we said we needed to fight out way beyond it, to "destroy the whole divisive structure and replace it with a spontaneous alliance of the people's own choice and making." This certainly is a process, a long-term process toward the formation of a global people capable of exercising global sovereignty, an alternative world, which we called Janakashaba.

My understanding of the people's alliance, the Alliance of Hope, therefore is differentiated from coalitions of people's movements or international coalitions of NGOs. The latter are important, in fact essential, as instruments to the processes of formation of the people's alliance but do not themselves mean the Alliance of Hope.

My broad view is that, as many would agree, we have entered into a historical era where globalization has seriously undermined state sovereignty while the state still remains the most entrenched institution of human society having the power of coercion over the people. We therefore need (1) to engender processes to let the global people emerge as the sovereign body for global democratic governance and (2) at once to engage in national politics so as to make national systems more accountable to the people. The 1992 Thai PP21 convergence described this duality as democracy from the family/community through national to the international level. Obviously, with the onset of the destructive neo-liberal globalization process, what we need is global democratic governance in this sense, and this is possible only when the globally constituted people exercise their sovereignty.

The 19th and 20th century dream in this respect was largely represented the ideal of proletarian internationalism: "Workers of the world, Unite!" The song Internationale (French version) has this ending, "Ah, Internationale, that will be tomorrow's world!" Here, the International was envisioned as the formation of a classless (domination-free) world itself, and not an international organization of communist parties. But what actually came were numbered Internationals (first to the fourth), all party internationals claiming to represent the workers and toiling masses without mandate. Later,

where revolutions occurred, the successful parties became states and the International became a miserable instrument to state politics and diplomacy.

In the post-1945 world, newly established nation states, some of them established through national social revolutions, emerged as the source of great hope for the radical remaking of the international order away from the colonial domination. The 1955 Bandung conference inspired us all as the torch bearer of this task. But that state-alliance of hope collapsed by the second half of the 1960s through Cuba, and then Vietnam for some time illuminated the world structure in a different light. Another state alliance, G77, emerged in the 1970s to confront the Northern dominance in the economic and institutional areas with its proposal for NIEO. But this state alliance failed to break the dominance of the Northern states and multinational corporations and collapsed in the early 80s. Nation states since then have been rapidly incorporated into the neo-liberal globalization regime as its national agents to carry out the global center-commissioned anti-people, anti-environment tasks against their own people. This prepared the ground for the post-911 anti-terrorist alliance in which most states have been debased to the status of national agents of the American imperial scheme. The historic failures of the party-state “international” and southern state “international” logically push us to “people’s international.” That is a people-to-people alliance whose powers are not mandated either to the party or the state. Parties and states will continue, but their functions should be made instrumental to the process of formation of transborder alliances of the people themselves.

Civil society and people’s alliance

Incidentally, are we then talking about “global citizenship,” or its corollary “international civil society,” words that came into vogue in the 1990s? Maybe we are talking about something similar insofar as global democratic governance matters in both discourses. Nevertheless I am not happy with the uncritical way such concepts have been, and still are, used in social movement circles. Global citizenship is an abstraction, based on the assumption that the world consists of basically homogenous individual citizens. There the diverse socio-economic, cultural, and historical settings in which people are embedded are bracketed, and this means that the actually existing people are reduced to one person-one-vote units. This can well be an insult on the rich diversity of human communities each with its own dignity, spirituality, culture, and rootedness. In actuality, the cosmopolitan idea of global citizenship appears to be an arrogant generalization, and therefore imposition, of the western civil society model on the diverse social models that enrich human society.

In the more immediate sense, the civil society model that flourished in the 1980s-90s seems to be the reflection of the international NGO culture shaped under the dominant influence of major Western NGOs and the UN agencies. Certainly the new use of “civil society” came from the theoretical formulation of the Polish Solidarity movement and as such it was highly relevant and rooted in the Polish workers’ resistance to the statist regime imposed by the Moscow power center. It had indeed an inspirational effect. But the way the concept later spread like wildfire among social movement activists, NGOs, UN agencies, and even World Bank, without in fact any serious definition given it, has been extremely unsettling to me. Is civil society something that exists? Or is it a normative model we all must emulate? Or is it a set of voluntarily organized institutions we favor? Or is it even synonymous to social movement? The seemingly accepted trilogy of state, market, and civil society (in which “we” are supposed to identify with civil society) confused me helplessly. Does civil society exist outside of the market?

In 1992, after the PP21 Thai convergence, I had the opportunity to attend the WCC-organized consultation in Geneva on international civil society. In the paper I presented there, I made the following points on this matter, which may be relevant to our present discussion and so I quote.

What is termed “international civil society” in this sense seems to be very close to what I mean by Alliance of Hope. However, I have some reservations about calling it international civil society although it is understandable that civil society is emphasized as against the state. First, civil society is largely a creation of the modern nation state. It is demarcated by national borders and filled with nationalist substance. That is why you call it “inter-national civil society.” Shouldn’t we envisage broader social relationships beyond national borders, instead of linking already nationally constituted civil societies? Second, as a concept modeled after European experience, civil society carries with it strong European flavors. I am afraid efforts to deodorate it may turn it into a meaningless abstraction. For instance, is Islamic Ummah a civil society? Civil society is a historical product — a product of modernity which is the creation of the West. Aren’t we where we face the entire consequence of modernity? Third, does civil society include all the residents in a certain territory as its full-fledged members? Weren’t the working class in the 18th- 19th century considered outcast of civil society? Aren’t there their equivalent in civil societies of today? Are “illegal” migrant workers members of civil society? Last but not least, isn’t it necessary to transform civil society itself for it is where exploitation of labor takes place and dominance of the poor by the rich, of women by patriarchy, and other social-economic forms of dominance are entrenched. Civil society approach does not give us a guideline as to how civil society should be transformed.

Do not misunderstand. I am not promoting “Asian values” against Western values as do some politicians and fundamentalist ideologists. On the contrary, we are talking about, and striving to achieve, human rights, democracy, gender justice, etc., coming largely from the western concepts. It is true that these concepts are being appropriated by the globalization regime to legitimize its imperial reign, like when Bush boasts that he bombed Afghan women into freedom. Generally, the Washington consensus packages democracy and human rights together with free market, free trade, privatization, free competition etc. as though they were the natural combination, and urges the people to swallow the package or else they would be punished. What we do is to unpack it, rescue the best elements of Enlightenment heritage out of it, and put them into packages we make for ourselves together with the best part of our heritage. These elements react and interact in our fecund packages and produce something new, neither labeled as “western” nor “Asian” but still owned as ours.

Mutually transformational interaction

This leads us to the notion of interaction as mutually transformational processes in people’s alliance building. In fact the PP21 processes since 1989 have generated numerous such interactions as Francis’ and Mohiuddin’s survey reports tell us. In certain contexts, an encounter with others has a profound effect on the thinking, and even relationships, in the people’s groups involved. It does not generate borderlessness but alters the cultures and relationships away from bigotry and toward transbordering.

This experience started in the drafting of the Minamata Declaration where leaders from the indigenous people’s movement in North America had strong objection to the use of “democracy” as a positive term. The discussion that took place was serious and stimulating. After all, we agreed on the formulation we used in the declaration: “One of the words which has been stolen from the people and corrupted is the word ‘democracy.’ Originally, democracy meant the autonomy, the self-determination, the empowerment of the people...For indigenous peoples and other minorities, democracy has been the ideology of ‘majority rule’ that has been defined them as ‘minorities’ who could be legitimately ignored...We need to retrieve it to serve the people’s struggle...” Democracy thus rethashed certainly was modified, and can no longer return to the vulgar version of liberal democracy. Or we recall what happened to the 13 indigenous peoples’ conference in Thailand,

where tribal leaders were exposed to pressure from women of their communities, who asked why they were not to be treated equally within their communities when their communities were demanding equality with the Thai nationals. The leaders accepted women's demands.

In some of their communities, NGOs were working cooperating with local women through women empowerment projects. So external influences were clearly there. But it would be a gross mistake to view what happened as another victory of the modern (western) values over the outdated traditions. Rather, we were a witness to the process of traditions being remade, not negated, by integration of the idea of gender equality. All traditions are made and remade in interaction with the external. "Western values" too have been thus made, and being remade. The change cannot, and should not, be measured by the degree to which the tradition has assimilated the "western values." In fact, the latter, too, are transformed by the same integration process. More importantly, this is not just transformation of the thinking and ideas, but can entail, and does entail as our experiences show, changes of the actual intra-group relationships of the groups involved toward more equality, fairness, and dignity of individuals. I am not going into details of many such examples from the past PP21 processes, but if you examine various stories contained in the Francis/Mouhiuddin reports, you are convinced that alliance building is not a romantic dream but on-going processes actuated by interaction.

But the context in which interaction takes place is essential. As earlier said, we (people's groups) are forced to live together, often in antagonism. Interaction in this context would mean, as it does in the numerous tragic cases of sectarian clashes, culmination of hatred to the point of mutual massacre. Only when a proper context in which people's groups can begin to see each others' faces in a different light can positive and cross-fertilizing interaction take place. Inevitably, there are two competing contexts - one that sets one people's group against another and the other that leads to alliance. In the first context, others are usually reduced to an abstraction, a certain label given to their group, and in the second which we are eager to set others appear as concrete human beings with their faces. PP21 has been successful, where it worked, in setting this second kind of context. Things start from there. In conferences and workshops we have had in recent years with grassroots participation, I was struck by the fact that "friendship" was the key word used by the participants to express the meaning of the event to them. That may sound a commonplace, but it was not. It was a discovery, fresh, pleasant and promising, of friends in those who had thereto been an abstraction and whose discourses totally foreign.

Sharing an alliance context is the beginning, but the alliance building work faces real challenges from there on. The most crucial challenge pertains to the actually existing structural oppressing/oppressed, exploiting/exploited relationships that divide the people. Often mutual antagonism and conflicts are fanned by misleaders who capitalize on the actually conflicting interests between groups. Unless the alliance building work helps to at least mitigate and eventually overcome these relationships, "friendship" would end up as hypocrisy and even turn to a source of distrust. In other words, we are referred back here to "class struggles" - in terms of "classes" not reduced to their economic positions but redefined in reference to structural power and subjective positions and relationalities. People's struggles for the changes in structural relations are going on everywhere addressing national power relations, acute local, national, and global issues, trying to change international institutions for the better, opposing and resisting the most blatant expressions of the global power elite strategies, advocating reforms in existing international institutions etc.

In fact, these efforts are being made at different levels, from grassroots mobilization like the Thai Assembly of the Poor, through struggles for national solutions like in Korea and East Timor to lobbying intergovernmental agencies. When in Kathmandu in 1996, we proposed that a People's Charter be worked out in pace with the progress of alliance building work, we had in perspective a process in which these struggles, movements, and campaigns will interact with one another on the

path toward effectively lessening and overcoming the oppressing/oppressed, exploiting/exploited, and dominating/dominated relationships step by step and in long-term perspective. This is indeed a major challenge still facing us all, particularly as global dominance of the power centers is becoming even more blatant under neo-liberal globalization, morally and ideologically justifying, and benefiting from, the aggravating inequalities and conflicts among the people. This is the challenge of the alliance of hope.

Kathumandu: Centrality of the people

Inspired by and enriched with vast experiences of South Asian people's struggles and wisdom, the PP21 1996 Kathmandu convergence made clearer what we mean by people's alliance. First of all, in the Sagarmatha declaration, we made a sort of Copernican shift of view, by affirming "the centrality of the people." "While the dominant economic and political systems attempt to relegate our concerns as peripheral, we collectively reaffirm the centrality of our struggles and our visions," we said. "This centrality is rooted in our daily lives, in our living and in steering our ways through the chaotic currents stirred up in the dominant systems. This centrality is the multiplicity of our practices and responses in which lie imaginative alternatives to the dominant systems." And we celebrated all the people's efforts being made for an alternative world.

This tone of Sagarmatha signaled our definite departure from the description of the people merely as rescue seeking victims of the global regime. In such cases, the ruling regime would be the one that defines us and we allow ourselves defined by them. In the Kathmandu declaration we refused to allow ourselves to be defined and declare that we collectively are the center by whose standard we define the immediately dominant forces. In actuality, the Empire rules and so we are victimized, but we made it clear that they had no legitimacy, nor capacity to rule. This is not empty bragging for the people in their multiple struggles have shown, and developed anew, alternative values, spiritualities, and ways to manage themselves and society as the declaration celebrated people's achievement one sector after another. As the spirituality of indigenous peoples inspired the Minamata convergence, South Asian feminist-developed values informed the whole Kathumandu event, projecting alternative values that will permeate society that we aspire to have. I think that the Kathmandu convergence, despite all the internal differences and clashes it suffered from, further developed the PP21 spirit born in Minamata and gave the people's alliance clearer contours as global people's sovereignty.

Resisting and building - people's alliance and rearticulation of social sectors

One thing that we made clear in Kathmandu was the need to integrate resisting and building alternative societies. The notion of the centrality of the people appreciates efforts to create alternative social, economic, and cultural systems here and now, countering the dominant influences of the globalization regime. The convergence and its preceding workshops were participated in by activists developing organic agriculture, building state-wide alternative resources development in India, alternative education, and many others struggling to introduce alternative modes of producing, consuming, and living. South Asia in fact is extremely rich with experience in this area, and 1996 PP21 benefited from it.

In this light, another crucial aspect of the people's alliance is brought to our consideration - the aspect of socio-economic rearticulation of people's groups. Let me explain, if in outline.

The moment we begin to talk about alternative society, we must go beyond a political alliance and consider how such society is economically and socially sustained. This involves articulation of

various sectors of the people playing different roles in sustenance of society, in other words, alliances between the people in these sectors. To simplify, the failures of state-oriented revolutions of the 20th century, from the Russian to the Cambodian, largely (if not wholly) reflected the failures of urban-rural (worker-farmer) alliances. In Russia the urban (represented as workers) vanquished the rural (represented as rich farmers, Kulak) while at the other extreme, Kumer Rouge in Cambodia physically annihilated the urban in the name of poor peasantry. The state-centered alliance is a political alliance against a common enemy which usually breaks up when the political objective has been achieved. But after achievement of immediate goals they are to shift to another kind of alliance that must represent socio-economic articulation of a whole society - a worker-peasant alliance (in the classical terminology). Economy then predominates as the society must be sustained. Again to simplify, it is farmers who feed the urban workers and it is workers who must provide farmers with agricultural supplies. If this relationship does not function, either side will crack down on the other, the political alliance then ends and dictatorship begins there. In the Russian case, the city-centered Bolsheviks expropriated the farmers, crashed their resistance, and established the Stalinist regime.

Now the situation is far more complex as we are living under the neo-liberal globalization regime. It is not just workers and peasantry, but various segments of the people located in diverse settings but connected over oceans and boundaries in crisscrossing networks of hierarchical division of labor shaped and dominated by transnational corporations and the global regime itself. This articulation of people's groups perpetuates inequality, exploits and expropriates women and children, subjugates agriculture, destroys environment while enriching the already too rich. It is this articulation of people's groups that should be disrupted by resistance and reorganized, or rearticulated, into a new alliance of people producing, trading, and consuming on a different set of principles in sustainable ways. What then is political governance making such rearticulated people's alliance possible?

This is certainly the hardest challenge we face, of course. But I think it is important for us now to see the whole expanse of the people's alliance concept we presented 13 years ago and have since developed step by step informed by dynamic people's experiences.

PP21 - Reviewing the process

The visions are grandiose, but what is PP21, where is it now as a movement? This is the question I anticipate. There can be, and in fact there are, different views among PP21 partners.

One thing that seems clear to me is that PP21 itself is not the alliance of hope in the sense that the alliance of hope, in my understanding, is envisioned as the mode of being of the world tomorrow. We can only help form such alliances. And there are numerous moves, movements, and initiatives that work to facilitate this process to bring about an alternative world by resisting the existing global regime, building alternative economic and other spaces, envisioning a peaceful, fair, just, and ecologically sustainable world society. We have been one of those efforts.

We started in Minamata with the Minamata declaration. Through the two subsequent major convergences, we developed the Minamata Declaration to the Rajchadamnoen Pledge and then to the Sagarmatha Declaration. This flow certainly represents continuity and as such PP21 identity. We are proud of having done these together, and with a large number of many people who went into productive, often sustained, interactions contributing to alliance building under PP21 programs. We can easily say that PP21 is there, in what we manifested and in what have happened under PP21 stimulus.

But what can it mean? Obviously we do not intend to create a whole set of movement coalitions labeled PP21, like PP21 labor movement or PP21 women's movement. No do we want to create

another big umbrella for NGOs. Then what are we? This has been a tormenting question lingering on right from the time of the Minamata convergence. When the Minamata participants, particularly those from abroad, enthused by the hot air prevailing throughout the program, proposed to continue the PP21 process, we were not prepared. What we had was a loose coalition of regional NGOs as co-conveners, but the actual work had been done by sectoral and local Japanese groups with the original proposer PARC taking the full responsibility for the whole program

When continuation of PP21 was discussed, ecologist Ui Jun thought that the name and address list of the participants would be sufficient by way of follow-up because people will begin necessary transborder action spontaneously, but the agreement was that the co-conveners would meet again in Hong Kong to discuss how to continue and that is there that Achan Surichai, after consultation with Thai groups, proposed to hold the second convergence in Thailand. That was the beginning. The PP21 process actually was promoted in the form of convergences (including subregional, like the PP21 South Asia, August 1993 and the PP21 Central America, Managua, 1992), prepared and convened by specific national and/or regional groups. Thus, it was the Thai NGO coalitions, ACFOD, and ARENA that assumed the joint responsibility for the Thai convergence and ACFOD, Sri Lankan, and Nepalese organizations that took the joint responsibility for the 1996 PP21 program in South Asia. The convergences thus were always initiated and carried out on the initiative, and at the responsibility, of volunteering groups, with, of course, the collaboration to varying degrees of other groups.

This sounds nice. But the realities were rather harsh. We suffered from serious problems probably inherent in this style of work. Some of them: (1) the heavy burdens on the shoulders of the initiating groups, (2) lack of clarity about decision-making processes, and (3) internal conflicts in the context of "NGO politics," aggravated by (2).

We tried to resolve the problems of organization by agreeing on setting up a minimum mechanism, the council, coordinating team, council chairs, and the secretariat under them. But this arrangement, which is rather conventional, has not functioned. Our experience shows that people's alliance building in the PP21 sense requires something new in organizational form. But before going into this topic, let me take a glimpse into the environment in which PP21 was operating.

1990s - NGO alliances

Let me be a little bit detached from our raw experience for the sake of reflection and look back on what happened in the 1990s in terms of people's alliance building in the most general sense. In this context I characterize the decade as the decade of emergence and ascendancy of international NGOs as a new officially recognized actor in the international politics, particularly on the issues involving neo-liberal globalization and its disastrous consequences. It was when the globalization drive from above was going to be pushed ahead at any cost (e.g. establishment of WTO). Aware that precisely this neo-liberal drive was undermining the legitimacy of the global regime and also compelled by the pressure from people-oriented campaign groups, the United Nations convened one major international conference after another beginning with the 1992 Rio Summit, which became arenas for NGOs' intervention mostly in the texts of the summit statements. Almost all NGOs (including grassroots groups) scrambled to participate in counter or parallel events to these UN conferences. This established NGOs' legitimacy as international political actors.

The picture was tricky and we need very careful analysis of this UN-NGO honeymoon, avoiding a simplistic verdict of positive or negative. It was positive in the sense that the global NGO coalitions were the most salient mode of being of people's alliance as demands and pressures from down below managed to find their way to the top in that mode, seeking official approval and recognition. The

main form of NGO activities was lobbying, led by lobbying specialists mainly from the west, but the UN occasions provided NGO-grassroots activists to come together in more movement type convergences.

But the other side of the story is that the various agencies of the globalization regime, the World Bank among others, laudably talking about NGOs roles in development, set out to fully integrate NGOs with their neo-liberal plans and schemes as their funded "partners" while major NGOs were given privileged spaces near the top where they can freely and safely talk their language, participation, sustainable development, human security, biodiversity, etc. This space can be a snare or another arena people's resistance is brought into. Not all NGOs are aware that if they are complacent with the newly acquired status, the space would quickly snares them.

So came a whole new NGO language into what used to be the arena of social movement - NGO-government-business partnership, participation, mainstreaming, engagement in the globalization process, social clause to WTO, etc. falling together into a system of thought guiding our practice. Even the legitimate notion of civil society in many cases has been drawn into this system of thought as the substitute for people's movement.

I think that time for intoxication is gone. It is gone because the situation has got worse in the 1990s and horrible particularly after September 11. It is gone also because where the plausible slogans have been tested, they proved unsuccessful in changing the real power relationship. Gains credited to NGO lobbying and NGO alliance activities are there in establishing legitimacy of important rights, and these are our precious assets. But the regime was also aware how to set a new hegemonic arena in which they could use its verbal acceptance of these rights to coopt NGOs into their grand neo-liberal design. By and large, what has been carried forward in the 1990s was the neo-liberal globalization scheme and the overall power relationship changed adversely, barring the limits of the international NGO coalition as the actor in global power politics.

But I say the 1990s mode of being of people's alliance is gone not negatively as that was gone because of the emergence of global people's movements resurrecting the role of mass action. Its emergence was of course marked by the Seattle demonstration that scuttled the WTO ministerial conference and probably opened a new phase for people's alliance building. Seattle showed us interesting interaction between usually heterogeneous groups, labor and ecologists, etc. It has been followed up by mass action in subsequent events of the globalization regime. I am not talking merely in reference to the form of activities, lobbying or street demonstration. Seattle eventually and unwittingly linked both. The point is to soberly measure how far we are coming closer to, and still how far from, the alliance of hope. And we could say now that after Seattle a new mode of being of people's alliance has been brought in, bringing the level of alliance closer to the grassroots.

Let me recall that PP21 has been operating in terms of public visibility mainly by holding major convergences of its own, which generated, as we all know, numerous linkages among different people's groups and individuals. Many of PP21 partners of course participated and played active roles in UN-convened conferences and parallel conferences. But PP21 dared hold its own convergences. We made and followed the calendar we ourselves made, instead of running after the U.N. prepared calendar. While our convergences were initiated by NGO-level initiatives, each of them was deeply rooted in the communities and people's movements in the host country or the host subregion. It could be safely said that we thus lived the tricky decade of the 1990s, interacting with, but not engulfed by the UN-NGO politics of the decade.

Now, in the post-Seattle situation, we see vigorous mobilization of people's movements and groups, and the initiative for global convergences. The World Social Forum held twice in Porto Alegre undoubtedly is one of the most salient convergences having grown from the post-Seattle mode of being of people's alliance. It appears that it is closest to PP21 convergences in reference to all the

characteristics of PP21 convergences I mentioned above. It is going to be held in 2003 again in Porto Alegre (preceded by an India-Asia version), and I hear that the venue is likely to be moved to Asia in 2004.

We are here to discuss the past and decide on the future of PP21. From the point of view of people's alliance building, I would personally propose that as far as people's convergence is concerned, we join force with the World Social Forum convergence in the spirit of PP21. In other words, we cease to be the convener of large convergences in the name of PP21 and close the large convergence phase of PP21. I propose that we do so positively because what we wanted, right from the Minamata conference, has been to help build people's alliance, and not to create our own exclusive movement or power base. It is an extremely welcome thing that a new phase has been opened up in alliance building work.

As was earlier said, the main visible expression of PP21 has been large convergences. The post-Kathmandu organizational mechanism was largely meant to meet the needs of organizing large convergences. If we are not organizing future major convergences of our own, the mode of operation as well as the nature of organization should be totally different.

But what is PP21 minus the convergence? If nothing remains, it is time for us to close PP21 once and for all. Is it so? Earlier I said, "We started in Minamata with the Minamata declaration. Through the two subsequent major convergences, we developed the Minamata Declaration to the Rajchadamnoen Pledge and then to the Sagarmatha Declaration. This flow certainly represents continuity and as such PP21 identity." If so, we have something we have worked out jointly and many of us identify with. In this sense, we are partners.

In alliance building, we have been talking and practicing interaction among people's groups. This is an act of going beyond borders in certain, constructive ways. We have some experience but far from enough. Probably there are numerous cases where encounters and interaction lead to mutual killing and hatred. It is vitally important that interaction occurs in certain virtuous contexts in which it leads to alliance processes. To let this happen, there need be facilitators. And there are such facilitators in various communities and social movements, who while engaged in the immediate tasks of their movements, are also concerned with others, search for ways to get coalesced beyond the given borders in PP21 perspective. In fact, the past PP21 convergences were made possible by the enthusiasm of those facilitators. They are from different sectors, working in different settings, some intellectuals and others grassroots workers. But their experiences, thinking, and insights have not been exchanged, theorized, and cross-fertilized because we were too busy with preparing large convergences.

PP21 will play an important role in people's alliance building if a vivacious network is made for the flow of ideas and experiences, out of which new action initiatives will emerge. Then we are having Phase II of PP21.