

News from around the world

World Social Forum: Power to the People

Sunday 1 April 2007, by [FONTEYN Danielle](#) (Date first published: 30 January 2007).

About 40,000 people came to Nairobi for the 7th World Social Forum (WSF). It was characterized by a big participation by Africans and by rich debates. The global justice movement has planned out a series of offensive mobilizations.

In the assembly of social movements, hundreds of activists who had come from all over the world, conducted by a South African woman revolutionary, repeated in chorus the legendary rallying cry of the anti-apartheid struggle: AMANDLA! OWETU! ("Power to the people!"). This image expresses the force and permanency of struggles in Africa and their profound internationalism.

For its 7th edition, around the theme "Peoples' struggles, peoples' alternatives", the WSF thus installed itself on African territory. On a continent marked more than any other by the ravages of neo-liberalism and war it was a question of affirming social movements that are rich from a long history, often little known, of struggles, resistances, and the search for alternatives. The debates at the forum, which began and ended with a long demonstration that started out from the biggest shanty town in the whole region, had a resonance that was both universal and quite particular.

Whether it was on questions of public health - where it is estimated that between now and 2015 nearly 120 million Africans are likely to die through lack of access to medical care, not to mention the present ravages of the AIDS pandemic - or on the question of the anti-war struggle - where a few days earlier American planes were bombarding neighbouring Somalia.

The women's movements were very visible, with the presence of many networks and local community groups. The significant mobilization of the religious networks and the big NGOs reflected their strong local presence and the reality of their work on the ground. Which was not without contradictions. Thus the organization of debates on women's rights or on the battle against AIDS by religious organizations, not really known for their progressive views on this kind of subject, led to polemics. But we were also able to see, for example, networks like that of African gays and lesbians strongly demanding equal rights, with the support of personalities like the South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

The crucial challenge for the WSF is now to pass over to a new stage. For the Egyptian economist Samir Amin, it is a question of moving from resistance onto the offensive, of organizing more effectively, in order to begin to build concrete alternatives. It is around this general perspective that the next dates for international mobilization were established. This should culminate with the World Day of Action in 2008, which will replace the WSF. Among the important dates to remember, there is the international anti-war mobilization of the weekend of March 20th, the mobilization for the right to housing in May, and those against the G8 at Rostock in Germany in June, for the cancellation of the debt in October, and against climate change in December. These mobilizations will be the occasion to reaffirm the urgency, for those below, of building an alternative to the world disorder which today governs us.

P.S.

* From International Viewpoint Website.