

Two Charters Compared

Comparison of Original April 2001 WSF Charter of Principles with Revised Charter of Principles issued in June 2001, as found on the WSF website in October 2003

Jai Sen, December 2003

Explanatory Notes :

This Note is a clause-by-clause comparison of the **original April 2001 WSF Charter of Principles**, dated April 9 2001 and also 'August 12 2001' (from now on referred to as the 'April (August) 2001' version, or **Version A**), with the **revised version of the Charter**, dated June 10 2001, as found on the World Social Forum website in English on October 23 2003 (from now on referred to as the 'June 2001 (October 2003)' version, or **Version B**).¹

I have prepared this Note because I have found that there are some significant differences between the original of the Charter I had on file and was constantly referring to and the one I found on the website – but more importantly because it is the first version that has been circulated, used, and referred to in India, ever since the WSF India process began, in January 2002. In other words, I realised only in October 2003 that what is known and widely referred to as 'the WSF Charter' in India is different from the revised and 'official' Charter.

In addition, the 'WSF India Policy Document' that was prepared in India in July 2002 was also based on the original April 2001 version, and so there are discrepancies between the WSF India policy document and the revised WSF Charter.

Since the document I had on file was a version that was circulated in India by Vijay Pratap (of the civil organisation Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, New Delhi) only on January 1 2002 – in other words, six months after the Charter was revised in June 2001 -, I put out a call in October 2003 for copies of the original 2001 version. On October 28 2003 Peter Waterman (researcher, writer, and political commentator based in The Hague, The Netherlands, who extensively writes on the Forum and on the global justice and solidarity movement more generally) sent me a copy of what he considers to be the original Charter. Significantly, his copy is dated 'August 12 2001', two months after the Charter was revised. This is the version he has been using and referring to. I compared this with the original I had on file (the one that had been circulated in India), and found them to be identical (except for the insertion of a colon in the title, in the version we were using in India, between the words 'World Social Forum' and 'Charter of Principles').

It remains unexplained how a copy of the April 2001 version, dated 'August 12 2001', was still available on the WSF website in late 2001 or early 2002 when the April 2001 original had in fact already been revised and approved by the new WSF 'International Council' on June 10 2001.

As will be evident from the following comparison of the two versions, all but three of the Clauses of the original version have changes in them, some very substantial. There is also a key clause in the original April (August) 2001 version (Clause 11) that is missing in the 'June 2001 (October 2003)' version, but this has been replaced by a related phrase in Clause 9. This means that there are only 14 clauses in Version B, as opposed to 15 in the original Version A.

Version A, the April (August) 2001 WSF Charter of Principles is given first, in Times Roman font. This is followed by the equivalent clause in Version B, as found on the FSM website in October 2003, in Verdana. This in turn is followed by comments from my side, in Garamond and in red. The changes are highlighted in yellow.

I believe that there are consequences to these changes and to the fact that it would seem that there are in effect two WSF Charter of Principles in existence today. I discuss these in a separate Note.²

World Social Forum Charter Of Principles

Version A / April (August) 2001 version :

The committee of Brazilian organizations that conceived of, and organized, the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre from January 25th to 30th, 2001, after evaluating the results of that Forum and the expectations it raised, consider it necessary and legitimate to draw up a Charter of Principles to guide the continued pursuit of that initiative in the terms of the Information Note that it issued at the close of the Forum. While the principles contained in this Charter – to be respected by all those who wish to take part in the process and to organize new editions of the World Social Forum – are a consolidation of the decisions that presided over the holding of the Porto Alegre Forum and ensured its success, they extend the reach of those decisions and define orientations that flow from their logic.

Version B / June 2001 (October 2003) version :

The committee of Brazilian organizations that conceived of, and organized, the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre from January 25th to 30th, 2001, after evaluating the results of that Forum and the expectations it raised, consider it necessary and legitimate to draw up a Charter of Principles to guide the continued pursuit of that initiative. While the principles contained in this Charter - to be respected by all those who wish to take part in the process and to organize new editions of the World Social Forum - are a consolidation of the decisions that presided over the holding of the Porto Alegre Forum and ensured its success, they extend the reach of those decisions and define orientations that flow from their logic.

[Comment : No change.]

Version A :

1. The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society centred on the human person.

Version B :

1. The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among humankind and between it and the Earth.

[A significant difference in the last phrase.]

2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that “Another world is possible”, it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.
2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localized in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that "another world is possible", it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.

Jai Sen, December 2003 – ‘Two Charters of Principles : A Comparison’

For discussion and comment

[No change.]

3. The World Social Forum is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.
3. The World Social Forum is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.

[No change.]

4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of capitalist globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests. They are designed to ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens – men and women – of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.
4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalization commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, **with the complicity of national governments**. They are designed to ensure that globalization in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens - men and women - of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.

[A key new phrase introduced in the June 2001 (October 2003) version / Version B.]

5. The World Social Forum brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but intends neither to be a body representing world civil society **nor to exclude from the debates it promotes those in positions of political responsibility, mandated by their peoples, who decide to enter into the commitments resulting from those debates.**
5. The World Social Forum brings together and interlinks only organizations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but intends neither to be a body representing world civil society. **[Rest missing.]**

[The last two clauses in Version A in this Clause are omitted in Version B – and without even changing / removing the 'neither' starting the previous clause. But a related phrase has been inserted as the last sentence in Clause 9 of Version B, as below :]

9. **The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.**

6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body.
6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. **It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.**

[The whole of last sentence has been inserted in Version B, brought here from Clause 8 in Version A, and deleted in the equivalent clause in B.]

7. Nonetheless, organizations or groups of organizations that participate in the Forum's meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its disposal, without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organizations or groups of organizations that made the decisions.
7. Nonetheless, organizations or groups of organizations that participate in the Forums meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its disposal, without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organizations or groups of organizations that made the decisions.

[No change.]

8. The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world. **It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organizations and movements that participate in it.**

[This entire sentence in Version A missing in the equivalent clause in Version B, and has been instead been inserted into Clause 6.]

8. The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.

[Last sentence of Version A missing here - but has been inserted into Clause 6. See above.]

[Major rearrangement from Version A to Version B.]

9. The World Social Forum asserts democracy as the avenue to resolving society's problems politically. As a meeting place, it is open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, races, ethnicities and cultures.
9. The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organizations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organizations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.

[The first sentence is significantly different between the two versions. The key last sentence in Version B replaces the last part of Clause 5 in Version A. One phrase in the second-to-last sentence (“nor military organizations”) would seem to replace Clause 11 in Version A.]

10. The World Social Forum is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, for peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, races, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.
10. The World Social Forum is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and [These terms added] history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, [Terms added] peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, [Changed] genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.

[Version B has some important provisions that have been added or changed, as highlighted.]

11. The meetings of the World Social Forum are always open to all those who wish to take part in them, except organizations that seek to take people's lives as a method of political action.

[This Clause is deleted in Version B, and replaced by a single phrase in the second-to-last last sentence of Clause 9, ‘military organisations’.]

[This missing clause explains the difference in the numbering of the remaining clauses.]

12. As a forum for debate, the World Social Forum is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the maximum possible transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives that can be proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and inequality that the process of capitalist globalization **currently prevalent** is creating **or aggravating**, internationally and within countries.

[Highlighted phrases in Version A missing in Version B (and certain phrases as highlighted below, added in).]

11. As a forum for debate, the World Social Forum is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and **social inequality** that the process of capitalist globalization **with its racist, sexist and environmentally destructive dimensions** is creating internationally and within countries.

[The highlighted phrases in Version B are missing in the 2001 version, and the highlighted phrases in Version A are missing here.]

13. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organizations and movements, and places special value on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature.

12. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition among its participant organizations and movements, and places special value **on the exchange among them, particularly** on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, **in the present and for future generations.**

[The highlighted phrases have been added, in Version B.]

14. As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organizations and movements of civil society, that – in both public and private life – will increase the capacity for social resistance to the process of dehumanization the world is undergoing and reinforce the humanizing measures being taken by the action of these movements and organizations.

13. As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organizations and movements of society, that - in both public and private life - will increase the capacity for **non-violent** social resistance to the process of dehumanisation the world is undergoing **and to the violence used by the State**, and reinforce the humanizing measures being taken by the action of these movements and organizations.

[The highlighted phrases have been added, in Version B.]

15. The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organizations and movements to situate their actions as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world.

14. The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organizations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking active participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity.

[These important highlighted phrases have been added, in Version B.]

Version A :

São Paulo, April 9 2001

ABONG – Brazilian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations

ATTAC – Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens

CBJP – Brazilian Justice and Peace Commission, National Council of Bishops (CNBB)

CIVES – Brazilian Business Association for Citizenship

CUT – Central Trade Union Confederation

IBASE – Brazilian Institute for Social and Economic Studies

CJG – Centre for Global Justice

MST – Movement of Landless Rural Workers

Version B :

Approved and adopted in São Paulo, on April 9, 2001, by the organizations that make up the World Social Forum Organising Committee, approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10, 2001.

[The list of the names of the founding organisations has been replaced by referring to them as the ‘World Social Forum Organising Committee’.]

js nd 231003 / 081103 / modified 181103 / revised 071203 / finalised 191203

Jai Sen

A-3 Defence Colony, New Delhi 110 024, India

Ph 91-11/2433 2451, 5155 1521

Eml jai.sen@vsnl.com

Notes

¹ I have closely compared the April 2001 original with the one dated August 12 2001 (which I obtained in October 2003 from Peter Waterman), and have found that they are identical in wording. The April 2001 original was circulated in India on January 1 2002 by Vijay Pratap, of the civil organisation Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam based in New Delhi, when he called a first national consultation on the World Social Forum in India. Vijay Pratap, January 2002 - Letter of invitation to WSF Consultation in India, dt January 1 2002.

² Jai Sen, December 2003d – ‘A Tale of Two Charters (or : ‘Another Charter Is (Im)Possible !’). 7 pp. URL: http://www.choike.org/documentos/Two_Charters.pdf

Jai Sen, December 2003 – ‘Two Charters of Principles : A Comparison’

For discussion and comment