



## FOREWORD

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# A FIERCE STRUGGLE TO RE-CREATE THE WORLD

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An event and an open space for debate and discussion. A forum for the articulation of alternatives embodied in the call, "Another World is Possible !" A process of continuous promotion, expansion, and protection of the open space by and for millions of people worldwide. The World Social Forum has indeed progressed from the unprecedented event it was in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in January 2001 when 25,000 to 30,000 people came to challenge the World Economic Forum being held during those very days in Davos, Switzerland.

Reading through the thoughtful discussions of those that have seen and experienced the evolution of the Forum, I am amazed at how easily I turn to my experiences in the women's movement to understand the questions now being raised. To achieve our dream of "another world," why don't we take greater control of the discussions, strategise together and methodically work on a plan to bring about that change ? Why not create a movement or an organisation ? How do we *involve* more people and groups worldwide in the process without really *directing* the process?

In the struggle for change, the women's movement has been good about beginning at the beginning. Change invariably starts when one reaches the "I-am-against" something stage. It is recognition that some things are not well. But the process doesn't really get going until we can name what is wrong, and why it's wrong. As in all things, "in the beginning is the word". Do we still remember the interminable consciousness-raising sessions about what was not going right ? Do we still remember when we finally said the word, 'patriarchy' ?

As with the women's movement, the initial instinct of the first Porto Alegre conference was one of being 'against' something. Porto Alegre was organised as an alternative to the World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland. At Porto Alegre, people came to discuss economic globalisation and the ills it had unleashed. Things were not going right.

When women found their voices — invariably with the help of other women — there was a need to spell out what they wanted. Having undertaken the de-construction process, construction could now proceed. The tortuous difficulty of getting "the word" reflects the process of liberation from standard frameworks and accepted paradigms. After studying



and naming the frameworks, structures and accompanying behaviours that oppressed us, what were the names of those new frameworks, structures and behaviours that would liberate us ? “Personal is Political,” “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” : whoever said it, was it easy to finally frame the issues thus ? It took years of discussions and reflection before the simple words came out of our mouths — but when they did, our road to change was clearer.

The second Porto Alegre gathering broke the oppressive mould that had bound us. We proclaimed, “Another World is Possible !” We had an empowering vision ! We had liberated ourselves from thinking that we were victims, or worse, tinkers — people who would tinker with the edges of globalisation to somehow make it work for people who were not the Davos types. We would ourselves define our world !

### **But what *is* that ‘other’ world that is possible ?**

As the women’s movement gathered momentum in various parts of the world, it became apparent that there was no issue that could not be called a *women’s* issue. As we discussed violence, we connected it not only to peace and security but also to power, rights and visibility. As we discussed health, we connected it not only to poverty but also to politics and technology and so on and so forth.

Those who remember the 5,000 events at the NGO Forum on Women in Beijing in 1995, will attest to the verity of the statement that all issues are indeed women’s issues and how interconnected the issues are. As Mumbai 2004 comes around, how could we bring focus to the discussions of “Another World is Possible!” ? The same issue confronted us as organisers of the NGO Forum: to get the free flow of ideas going, and at the same time bringing some focus to the discussions.

As I review the global forces chosen by the NGO Forum on Women as those confronting the greatest number of women in 1995, I wonder if they are not the same themes that need to be included in discussions of “another world”. These are : globalisation of the economy, including the impact of the technological revolution on work; obstacles to peace and human security, including the effects of militarisation, violence, and poverty; approaches to governance, including questions of citizenship and political participation; the rise of conservatism in its various forms — religious, nationalist, racial / ethnic, and homophobic. And the globalisation of media, culture, and communications.

From the plenary presentations certain crosscutting issues emerged — of identity; human rights; the respective roles of the state, civil society, the private sector, international organisations; and NGOs and institutional transformation.

The speed and nature of these global forces — with the added depiction of terrorism as the greatest international problem in the world today — demand that the WSF consider its role and function more seriously than ever.

As thousands and thousands of people are attracted to the WSF for its call and vision, the need for that open space, nay, the *defence* of that open, non-threatening space must continue to be a prime objective. In that open space will come the words that we all need to define that “another world”. Openness is both a strategy and a goal in a world increasingly constricting to the alternatives it offers to human beings to live a truly human, happy life.

As in the women’s movement, the empowerment of each person remains their own desire and decision. In the process of defining and then achieving “another world”, the WSF can play a vital role in providing the environment in which individuals and groups decide to form strategic alliances and take all the other steps they can do together. It will mean sometimes

that some of those who have always had leadership positions in the various 'alternative' movements commit themselves to keeping that open space truly open to all.

However, being open also means being smart. It is not enough to have a non-threatening space, or to articulate with even greater refinement and clarity the vision of another humane world for all. It is important, too, that the WSF not avoid the issue of structure. Too often social movements have shied away from organising themselves into structures that will effectively enable people and groups to engage in the promotion and protection of its vision. There is a sense that somehow it goes against the goal of openness and the attendant diversity of choices that will emerge.

I believe that we are sometimes afraid of our own use of power. Having seen and experienced its mis-use and abuse, we would rather we didn't hold it at all. The NGO Forum on Women avoided the idea of structure and women have suffered for it. After having organised dynamic and vital regional conferences leading up to the mammoth Beijing gathering, the Forum was poised to become a truly inter-regional structure that could advance women's interests in the global arena. Instead, it opted to be only an 'event', a 'space', a 'gathering'.

I truly hope the organisers of the WSF will see their way clear to finding the appropriate structures and decision — making processes that will show the world the kind of power that enables and empowers. Yes, another world is possible!

Paolo Freire, the great Brazilian educator, in his landmark work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, wrote that we need to embark on a "fierce struggle to re-create the world". One of the tasks of the progressive educator, he said, is to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be. Without a minimum of hope, he said, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without struggle, hope dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness. And hopelessness can become tragic despair.

The WSF is engaged in that fierce struggle to re-create the world. And in proclaiming that "Another World is Possible !" it unveils great opportunities for hope in a world so badly in need of transformation.

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