



African flame

Another World
is Possible

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African Social Forum, Lusaka (ZAMBIA)

Forum to confront critical questions

By Console Tleane, South Africa

THE opening session of the Third African Social Forum meeting held in the capital of Zambia, Lusaka, was very much reflective of the continent that is Africa. Held under the broad rallying theme "Another Africa is Possible", the meeting brought together delegates from almost all corners of the continent.

The opening was a mixture of fierce political speeches, from the radical tones from the South African delegation whose representative told the conference about daily struggles being waged against "corporate neo-liberalism" through to the rather accomodationist announcement by the Malawi Social Forum that the Malawian Chapter has the full backing of the government of President Bingu Wa Mutharika, and collaborates fully with it, and celebration of the rich African artistic expression.

In between the fierce (and not so fierce) speeches, calling for the total liberation of the continent from the clutches of imperialist rule, was song and dance from the local band Sakala Brothers whose tunes and dance routines kept delegates on their toes.

But the song and dance did not detract delegates from the realities of the continent that they had gathered to reflect upon. Debt, Aids, poverty, education, struggles for free water and electricity; all these formed the basis of many of the speeches delivered in the opening session.

It is these harsh realities that the ASF will have to ask itself whether it is able, or will be able, to address or at least highlight and rally its member organizations and peoples all over the continent to carry on as theirs so that they are ultimately and fully resolved by the powers that be both on the continent, and other parts of the world.

While hailed by many as creating the necessary spaces for networking and forming the necessary alliances to confront imperialism, both the ASF and the World Social Forum have increasingly come under criticism for being talkshops that do not carry out meaningful programmes to challenge the excesses of imperialism.

In the past the WSF has been criticized for being a forum for those who have "passports, visas, money, and credit cards". This point was indirectly articulated by Mohammed Said Saad from Morocco who said the following: "It is important that our movement is not simply seen as a group of individuals from NGOs who like to travel a lot yet fail to carry out meaningful work on the ground." He challenged the ASF to take stock of any progress that it might claim to have made since its inception.

Indeed, the ASF is faced with a lot of challenges. There are a lot of expectations on this body to safe a continent that is currently faced with a myriad of crisis situations. What with the crisis in Cote-d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, the never ending strife and wars in the Great Lakes region, the genocide and mass displacement of people in Sudan, and the ignored dictatorships of regimes like Swaziland?

The ASF carries, and should address, the hopes of people like Victoria Chisemphe of Cote-d'Ivoire who told the meeting in a rather disturbing tone that, "Our country is being run down. We call on the ASF to do something. We, the civil society in the Cote-d'Ivoire, have given up. We have resigned ourselves to the fact that politicians are running the show and perhaps they will resolve the problem. Yet we all know their track record in trying to resolve problems."

The ASF will also have to address head-on some of the seeming contradictions that its member organizations find themselves in on a daily basis. For instance, time is catching up with some of the organizations, and therefore the ASF itself, to openly discuss and take a stand concerning how to deal with and relate to multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the WTO.

Ironically, as the delegates were settling down for the opening ceremony at Mulungushi Hall, a few kilometers from the venue a meeting of a World Bank committee was also seating at the Taj Pamodzi hotel (where some of the ASF delegates were residing).

Would a suggestion by an anti-World Bank grouping within the



Wahu Kaara from Kenya expressing her point on women's court

ASF to hold a demonstration against the WB meeting be carried by the ASF meeting?

In a similar vein, debates surrounding Nepad have always caused animated debates within some ASF meetings. The question is, should the ASF address these contradictions once and for all, or should the Forum maintain these contradictions by simply being content with the minimum programme or call of believing that "Another Africa is Possible". How is it "possible" under the current world political and economic regime?

Despite these observations, and criticisms, one thing cannot be denied; the ASF is gradually achieving what most other initiatives before it have failed to accomplish – creating a platform for activists and organizations to begin asking critical questions about the state of the African continent.

Through a sheer process of natural political attrition the issues and pertinent questions that need to be confronted will either receive attention or force themselves on those who continue to attend similar meetings with the hope of creating "Another Africa".

ASF officially opened yesterday

By Glory Mushingwe

THE Third edition of the Africa Social Forum (ASF) opened in Lusaka yesterday amidst such splendor and great expectations from participants.

Most of the participants interviewed said they were excited at the opportunity to bring together the African Civil Society movement and hoped for fruitful deliberations.

"This is an opportunity for representatives from different components of Civil Society to tell the vision of Another Africa and that meets my expectations," said Atidegle Aukelien of Benin while Adrien Vitou of Burkina Faso stated that he expected the forum to find strategies of countering bad political process.

Moussa Faye of Action Aid, Senegal was also optimistic saying there was need for the different themes to be strengthened by the gathering and that the whole African Civil Society would get more coordinated.

The event that brought together participants from various corners of Africa saw such mind provoking speeches being presented by the highly esteemed speakers as well as rich artistic and cultural displays in form of dance and music from some of the best dance groups in the country.

Solidarity messages were

delivered by representatives of organizations such as the Third World Network of Africa, Egyptian Social Forum, and National association for Human Rights & Development and The National Forum against Debt and Poverty.

Representatives from The Nigerian Social Forum, Malawi Social Forum, African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) as well as other national and international organizations and civil society movements were also present.

Issues raised ranged from the spectra of re-colonisation which was creeping back to Africa via the European Union bilateral talks with Africa to the fact that the civil society movement in developing countries needed resist recolonisation.

Corruption and dictatorship also took center stage.

Chairperson of the Egyptian Social Forum, Amir Salem cited the lack of democracy and human rights in Africa as issues of concern that were being compounded by corruption and dictatorship.

"We need to change our social and economic life. We need governments to respect human rights ad we need to fight back against parachuting plans of the World Bank, IMF and multi-national companies and

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Come and watch our fantastic performance of our Zambia Musician for the
Africa Social Forum Concert

SAKALA BROTHERS
AMAYENGE
DANNY

Free Entry

DATE: Monday 13th December 2004

VENUE: Mulungushi International Conference centre

TIME: 18:00 hours Till late

ASF officially opened yesterday

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nations controlling our country," he cautioned.

From the women's perspective, a Zambian representative of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) Sara Longwe observed that time had come for the women of Africa to say 'enough is enough' and claim their place.

She stated that it was time for women in particular and the civil Society in general to their rights being taken over and marginalized.

And presenting the Ivory Coast story was Kone Solanje of the national Forum Against Debt and Poverty who expressed concern at the economic and civil war that went on in the country as well as other parts of her region.

Solange lamented that the war had created economic hardships which led into scarcity of jobs there by driving citizens especially the young who suffered from redundancy to getting jobs as child soldiers, a situation which she described as unfortunate as the young ones were forced to fight.

"In my country, we have had war since 2002 and politicians are the ones involved in mediation processes against war instead of the civil Society movements. The result is that things become even worse."

She suggested that it was time that the civil society took up the mediation process in wars, as this was the group that was not scared of anything.

Also part of the opening days' activities was the women's court, which took place in the Afternoon and had a range of presentations starting from song, poems and testimonies.

The women's tribunal, an idea that was born in 1992 in Asia by the Asian Women Human Rights Council was designed to highlight the issues that women in various parts of Africa faced, after which members of the jury that is formed during the court are able to analyse the issue through different comments.

The Forum highlighted, Poverty, Structural Adjustment Programme, trafficking and effects of globalisation.

This particular session had such women speakers as Wahu Kaara from Kenya, Corrine Kumar of India, Veneranda Nzambazamaria of Rwanda and Sara Longwe from Zambia

Artists at the opening included the ever vibrant Sakala Brothers who brought everyone to their feet, Zuba Nimoto, a dance troupe and woman musician, Jane Osborn all from Zambia, while The Kenya social Forum representatives sang "Wimbo Wamapambano", which they hoped could be transformed into an Africa Social Forum anthem. The latter also presented a poem titled African Queens, which applauded the liberation efforts of some of the early African liberation activists.

The pomp and fanfare has set the stage for a successful Forum.

Feminist Dialogue comes to Africa

By Brenda Zulu

FACED with intense backlash, Feminist activists in Africa have shown that they have resilience and renewed energy to mobilize.

Ten years after Beijing, women are still fighting against political-religious fundamentalisms, war and militarism, a shift from human rights to "war on terror" and an intensification of the neo-liberal agenda, including the privatization of water.

The setting of the Africa Social Forum (ASF) in Lusaka, Zambia in December 2004 offers a strategic space for feminists to review challenges confronting them and their role within African social movements.

Through the Feminist Dialogue that is being organized by FEMNET, ASF hopes to bring together different feminist perspectives on issues of concern in the women's movements.

ASF gender focal point, Sara Longwe pointed out that the Feminist Dialogue will also be held during the WSF if Africa hosts the event in 2007.

The dialogue seeks to emphasize the multiplicity of strategies that women's movements have employed in their everyday political practice. The Dialogue aims at contributing towards building synergies within feminist networks, the women's movements and with other social movements.



African Flame

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Forum to launch Stop EPA campaign

AFRICAN Agenda magazine, which is published six times a year by the Accra-based Third World Network – Africa has produced a special issue for the African Social Forum 2004. The issue is dedicated to the Stop EPAs campaign, which will be launched here at the Forum.

In the editorial, the magazine explained that the African Trade network has adopted the STOP EPAs campaign because African civil society is deeply concerned about the detrimental impact that

the EPAs – which are in essence Free Trade Areas between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific group of countries (ACP) – will have on the social and economic development of ACP countries, and the way the EU is rushing into the negotiations.

The editorial also points out that European civil society groups have added their voice to the STOPEPAs campaign and are lobbying the European Commission and its member

states as well as trying to spark off a public debate on the EPAs in Europe. Copies of the free supplement are available at the Conference Centre.

As part of its coverage of the ASF, Third World Network – Africa has also created a dedicated "page" on its website to carry news, information and features from, and on the Forum. The page can be accessed at www.twnafrica.org and contributions and comments should be sent to webjournalist@twnafrica.org

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE AFRICAN SOCIAL FORUM DELEGATES

By Aaron Mwewa

Mwamba Lubemba – Youth Activist (ZAMBIA)

It should not just be another talking shop. What Africa needs at the moment are serious people who want action and implementation. The delegates here are saying so many beautiful things but what will matter at the end of the day after all is said and done is the implementation.

Etim Imisim – Journalist (Nigeria)

The civil society should have a place and say in the governance of Africa. The feeling across the continent at present is that the input of the civil society in the governance process has been neglected. The main reason is that civil activism is still in its infancy and needs to be given time if it is to become a strong force for change. That is why I expect the delegates at the ASF to be realistic as they make their demands and recommendations. They should way the opportunities are for them to foster change against the harsh realities of things.

Cecilia Nedziwe – American Friends

ASF is like an open space that brings the civil society organizations so that they can find solutions to the problems they we are facing and then lobby government to implement them. I also want to urge the participants to ensure that the final message from the ASF

is delivered to the right people. It needs to be delivered to the people that make decisions in parliament and should not just end up with only the civil society groups.

Pastor Fracis Nyati – Jubilee Zambia

ASF should bring about a unit, which will knit together all the Africans not to go back into Neo-colonialism and not to give in to projects from the west that will not have an African touch and agenda. Africans are a rich people but have severely been marginalized by projects that seek only to benefit the multilateral institutions and not the local people.

When Multilaterals come into our countries, they do not allow the locals to have a say in the way issues are addressed and this is what we should address.

Everything has its own genesis, right from here at this gathering, a huge revolution can be started.

Naomi Jere – Zambia Alliance for Women

I hope to learn something especially were it concerns poverty reduction and HIV/AIDS prevalence rates among girls and women because they are the worst affected by such problems.

Farai Monro- Zimbabwe Social Forum

This forum should build networks and must present space at which we can share experiences. It is important to build coalitions against capitalism and a platform at which our problems can be tackled at the African level. Africa has enough resources and brains to build a better destiny for itself.

ASF should become more of a process than an event at which we shall start dealing with the day-to-day issues that affect. I think there is a lot of excitement and enthusiasm to foster change but it slightly different from what happens at forums in Europe and that is because the people that side have a lot of resources but still that should not deter us as we still also have a lot of enthusiasm.

My major source of concern is that from what I have seen their has not been enough mobilization here in Zambia for locals to come through. We needed to see the women and children from the compounds coming through to articulate their issues. It's going to take time to build the Africa that we have always hoped for but with perseverance, patience and dedication we can build an Africa

so different from the one we had in the 1800 hundreds.

This forum must also come up with ways that will ensure that governance is broken down from parliament to the common people in their various communities.

George Makaha – Jubilee Zambia

We should firstly take stock of what was recommended at the last forum and then find out what has been achieved and what has failed. Then from there we can pick up this years process.

But I must say that I am not too happy with the low turn out of Zambian NGO 's, the forum is being held right in their country were are they? I also think there has not been enough energy generated, as there has not been a lot of advertising and publicity concerning the event.

Rose Khumalo – South Africa

This is my first time to attend the forum, but I have still heard a lot of stories about it and so I expect to hear for my self the stories I have heard from my colleagues. I hope took take home a lot of solutions on the problems that we face so that I can share them with my people.

Musonda Kalasa – Harvest Help Zambia

I only thought that it was going to be a time for us to exhibit our work but to my pleasant surprise I have found that it is a time serious reflection and advocacy on the problems that we face. I am particularly interested to learn on how other African countries are handling the problems that are being faced by the youth and women.

Mary Furlong – Kara Counseling Volunteer from United States of America

I became interested in forums after the Seattle protest in America in 1999. It is good that even as the rich in the west are meeting at the foras, the Africans are also holding their own meetings to come up with their own solutions to their own problems. Lets make this forum relevant to the Africa cause by ensuring that the solutions we come up with are relevant to the African development discourse so that they can be adopted.