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Thematic Social Forum

Capitalist Crisis, Social and
Environmental Justice

Great Porto Alegre, January 24th to 29th, 2012

Towards People's Summit of Rio+20

Porto Alegre e Região Metropolitana

The convergence of crisis engender a crisis of civilization

Rio + 20: an opportunity? The second phase of the capitalist economic crisis arisen- now centered in Europe, but reaching all the core countries – prompts the perverse social effects of the severe recession triggered in 2008. At the same time, continued growth in China and other developing countries demands more and more natural resources. Both processes harshly impact the global environmental crisis and collaborate to sharp social inequalities, creating new humanitarian crisis. All of them require urgent responses, which no government can give. All of them require a major reform of the current economic, social, cultural, and political system – the global capitalism and its institutions. It shapes, overall, a crisis of civilization, which carries the fate of billions of human beings.

On the horizon, there is a worldwide meeting where these issues could be discussed and the solutions found, if there was a real political will among the major nations' leaders, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) to be held in Rio de Janeiro between May 26th and June 6th, 2012. This meeting carries the symbolism of the twenty years of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Summit 92) and the cycle of its following conferences, an episode in which emerged the diagnosis that the world has been gathering huge structural problems and where proposals to face them were elaborated.

But the rulers of the great countries of the North and the South will hardly avail the opportunity. They are concerned about maintaining the highest possible growth, as well as about the health of the banks, speculators and speculative capital. The multiple crisis in which global society is sinking - climate, food, living conditions, political and ethical values – is not consider by these leaders as a priority. We can

expect nothing from them and the forces that sustain them, increasingly insensitive about the fate of humanity.

Change will certainly come, but they will only happen if driven from the bottom up, by the central role of civil society.

"Emerging" and "developed": unequal dynamics and paces. In the current world power structure, controlled by the interests of the great corporations, there is no real intention from the "developed" and "emerging" countries, to face the "development business". But there is an enormous change in the global geopolitics. Global capitalism now works at two speeds, which seems to be a disconnection between the dynamics of accumulation at the core countries and in the so-called emerging markets, posing new problems for the social transformation.

On the one hand, rich countries are being affected by the stagnation and the crisis, although the corporations maintain their capital accumulation, and the market speculators have their profits guaranteed; at the same time, the majority of the population faces austerity policies, massive unemployment rates, the rise of inequalities and the strengthening of conservative political streams and right-wing policies - such as the racist's groups of the Tea Party in the United States and the xenophobic groups in Europe

On the other hand, the great "emerging" countries continue to expand their economies in the framework of global capitalism. The exaltation of its growth, acclaimed by almost everyone, reveals a complete unawareness about the problems that lies on the horizon. The crisis of neoliberalism's "financial creativeness" has stimulated the rebirth of developmentalism. Millions of people are improving their standards of living in Asia and Latin America, consuming a little more than before, although the social inequality is also increasing almost everywhere. The economic growth is made by the increase of its contradictions: inequality and income concentration, over-exploitation and job insecurity, environmental degradation, concentration of land ownership, growth of slums, poor

social services. Nevertheless, the impact of these small improvements has been prevailing over the perception of such contradictions, and the logic of "everything goes well" impedes the creation of a counter-hegemonic project.

So, three years after the deepest economic crises since 1929, three years after the commodities and food price rise due to the speculation by financial giants, four years after the warning of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) about the urgency of a low carbon economy transition, all the problems have been dragged on with no perspective of solution, with the established powers only concerned about maintaining business as usual. No lesson was learned and no structural change was made, intensifying the impasses that are being accumulated in this suicide logical.

Lack of alternatives paradigms and fragmentation. In the absence of another paradigm of civilization to confront the capitalist machine, it moves under the same goals and usual approach as always: to grow more, to expand exports and imports, to produce and consume more industrial goods, to create and use more and more increasingly sophisticated services accessible to a growing number of people - inside an economic system that goes into crisis every time it can not grow 3% per year and ensure the profitability of capital. As hundreds millions of people enter the society of mass consumption and pursue the way of living exported by the American capitalism as an ideal of happiness, they demand an increasing amount of ostentatious goods, created within the logic of planned obsolescence, private use, waste and disposability. And consume more and more resources: energy, raw materials, food and environmental services. This growth nourishes new and future crises of fuel, raw materials and food; accelerates emissions of greenhouse gases and global warming. Therefore, the capital can only appoint with illusory promises that technological innovations would solve the problems. And to ensure that no threat to the system may flourish, democracy is corrupted by the power of money or, when necessary, suppressed.

Indignant citizens rebel against all of this, in many parts of the world - in squares of the Arab world and Europe, in Abya Yala roads, in the streets and forests of Brazil. But the dynamic of the anti-systemic forces is still very fragmented, heterogeneous, unequal and disarticulated, between continents and countries of the same region. It has not been made yet the alliance between them, the articulation that joins the diversity into a great and irreversible movement.

The People's Rio + 20 and the World Social Forum process

The People's Meeting. The symbolism that Rio + 20 Conference offers, despite the demoralization of the negotiations within the framework of the UN, an opportunity for civil society to meet, present their proposals and organize their struggles. And, moreover, present a new paradigm of economy, society and politics, in which the serious problems accumulated in this crisis of civilization can be confronted and eventually defeated. A paradigm that is able to strengthen the movements opposed to the system and to be reinforced and developed by them.

In this sense, the Brazilian Civil Society Facilitating Committee for Rio +20 is calling civil society organizations and social and popular movements from all around the world to a process that will culminate in June 2012 into the autonomous and plural event, provisionally called People's Summit of the Rio +20 for Social and Environmental Justice, parallel to the official Conference.

As stated in its call "**Come to reinvent the world in Rio +20**":

The political momentum provided by the Rio +20 is a unique opportunity to "reinvent the world," identifying the means of escape of the dangerous path we are treading. However, taking into account the actions of hegemonic actors of the international system and the mediocrity of the international agreements negotiated in recent years, their false solutions and the neglect of the principles already agreed Rio92, we understand that we shall not give up to influence their actions, either we should not have illusions it can trigger a virtuous cycle of negotiations and significant commitments to confront the serious problems that both humanity and the planet are facing.

We understand the necessary agenda for democratic global governance supposes the ending of the current condition where multilateral spaces are captured by the corporate world. A change may emerge only from the action of various social actors, networks, non-governmental organizations and social movements in different areas of action, including environmentalists, workers / urban and rural areas, women, youth, popular movements, indigenous peoples, ethnic groups discriminated, developers of the solidarity economy, etc. We need to build a new paradigm of social, economic and political organization that- based on the experiences of the real struggles from these sectors and on the existing material and technological conditions for the establishment of new forms of production, consumption and political organization - leverage its performance.

For the ones of the WSF process, this is a unique opportunity to deepen the discussions and the struggle for another world that we are willing to build, in order to improve the construction of sustainable and popular alternatives. This meeting can help the actors and movements that resist against neoliberal globalization to build a framework of systemic overcoming of the capitalist order.

The role of the WSF process. The World Social Forum process has discussed in Belem, in 2009, and again in Dakar, in 2011, the major challenges of a global civilization in crisis (both in the sense of crisis and of opportunity) which we are facing. It was also discussed, more deeply, the elements of the new political agenda that the actors of the WSF process were emphasizing over the last period: the defense of common goods and the open access to knowledge and culture; the central role of social and environmental sustainability in any alternative project; the welfare and generosity/gratuity economy; the pursuit of the “well living” as life’s main objective, the organization of political power based on the plurinational framework and participatory democracy; the relationship between rights and collective responsibilities; the global geopolitical reordering and its problems of governance, besides other elements that integrate an extensive agenda, but not exhaustive, which was accompanied by innumerable other debates and dialogues with the proposals that intersect with it.

Now – facing this opportunity presented by the Peoples' Summit of the Rio +20 for Social and Environmental Justice - we believe the WSF process must offer its contribution to boost the preparation of the People’s Summit and to help to settle its agenda, by organizing a Thematic Social Forum in Porto Alegre between January 24th and 29th, 2012. It will be a Forum to discuss the crisis and the emergency policies to be taken in order to ensure the survival and well-being of hundreds of millions of people. This forum will explore the ways to affirm alternative paradigms opposed to industrial, productivist and consumerist civilization, and the agenda of social transformation that corresponds to it. A forum to strengthen the connections between the actors and actresses committed to this agenda, to mobilize them for action, encourage their convergence and support their effective participation in the Peoples' Summit.

We consider this initiative - in the sequence of the G20 protests in November in Paris, and the activities planned by civil society on the occasion of COP 17, in Durban, South Africa, in late 2011 - crucial to strengthen and enhance the preparation of the Peoples' Summit of Rio +20.

Thematic Forum's methodology

The Group of Reflection and Support to the World Social Forum Process (GRAP-WSF) and the Thematic Social Forum Organizing Committee are now launching the initial proposal of the process- which should be complemented at the International Seminar during October 22nd and 23rd - in dialogue with the networks which compromise themselves with it.

We think that a methodology of a Thematic Social Forum (TSF), capable of leveraging the preparatory process of the civil society's activities at Rio +20, should be different from the others forum – that were increasingly being structured only by self-organized activities with free themes. To effectively fulfill its role, this forum will have to focus – without diminishing its place of expression of the pluralism and the diversity of positions of those who struggle against neoliberal globalization and for another world – especially on the agenda to be disputed at Rio +20 and the goals set by the People's Summit, reinforcing those processes.

The three fields of the TSF. Accordingly, the Forum should be divided into three fields, including different types of activities: the self-organized activities, freely conducted by their promoting organizations with an agenda related to the Forum's theme; the self-organized activities linked to thematic groups and strategic issues, but also connected among themselves and to the organizers of the Forum; and the preparatory activities of specific proposals to the Peoples' Summit of Rio +20.

Our goal remains, consistent with the WSF Charter of Principles, to establish an autonomous space for discussion in contrast to international institutions, capitalist's corporations and the State powers. It is a plural framework that values the diversity of global civil society, and transforms it into relevant political force, encouraging convergence and common agendas. We seek to incorporate into our

process the strength, energy and initiative of thousands of organizations and movements. In order to achieve it, the starting point is their actual experience, both in its autonomous activity as in its ability to converge with other subjects.

The methodology for the activities freely organized by its proponents - **the first field of TSF** - is already a heritage of the WSF process and can take place in Porto Alegre in 2012, inscribed into the axis established at the last WSF, held in Dakar. They will take place in the multiple spaces where the TSF will occur, from the arrangement between territories and themes organized by the Gaucho Committee.

But we need to innovate in the second and third aspects.

Therefore, we propose to organize **thematic Groups in the second field of TSF** – a process capable of harboring multiple experiences and contributions from the various social actors which will be, at this moment, linked to some broad and mobilizing themes, in order to integrate the actors and actresses from various movements.

We would begin, from this Seminar of Methodology, the constitution of **self-organized thematic groups** that would work on issues related to "capitalist crisis, social and environmental justice" in dialogue with the organizers of the TSF and also based on a dynamic of collective and inclusive work.

One precondition to the constitution of a thematic group would be their relation with the sustainability, social and environmental agenda.

One second condition would be the existence of one or more networks or organizations able to constantly contribute both politically and operationally to the debate, stimulate its expansion and help to systematize the discussions made in the electronic forums. The mediator status of the thematic group does not imply a special position on the debate, but the responsibility for the qualifying its outputs.

A third requisite would be the international scope of the group and its condition to enable the discussion in different languages according to its participants.

Minimum common agenda for the thematic groups and crosscutting issues. We propose that all thematic groups work its specific theme in dialogue with a minimum agenda that includes:

- Circumscribing its issues within the challenges posed by the conjuncture and the Rio +20;
- Identifying the structural causes that affect its issues;
- Evaluating the mechanisms of reproduction of the current ideas;
- Presenting the alternatives that already exist and their role in an agenda of transition;
- Identifying, mapping and enhancing campaigns and proposals that lead to it;
- Stimulating the dialogue and convergence with other themes and social actors.

Besides that, an International Seminar on Methodology should help to form some strategic crosscutting questions, – seeking for synergy with the Brazilian Civil Society Facilitating Committee for Rio + 20 – to foster the discussion and the confluence between the thematic groups, in a strategic perspective of overcoming the current model and assuring a new paradigm of civilization.

The third field: to encourage significant initiatives. Rio +20 agenda carries the symbolism of 20 years of struggle to preserve the planet and the rights of peoples and populations. Involved in dispute of ideas and in construction of a counter-hegemony, we should seek to endorse a range of activities and initiatives towards the People's Summit to contribute to it. They may even impact the official process if we are able to start a "snowball" process.

It have been signed or launched in 1992 three international conventions: those on climate, biodiversity and desertification, besides the Agenda 21. The evaluation of these initiatives was originally on the official agenda for Rio +20, but it was removed because the assessment of compliance by the signatory states reveals an insignificant or even demoralizing result. It is important that civil society performs its evaluation about the meaning and implementation of these agreements. And remember that in 1992 agreements were also signed conventions between NGOs, on which we must now return.

New agreements are being drafted or raised on the sidelines of the UN system. We want to make the TSF and the People's Summit as spaces for them to be openly debated.

Specific initiatives for Rio +20 are being prepared by indigenous peoples and other sectors, that should be able to use the TSF space to strengthen its organization.

There is, in the same way, proposals such as the Earth Protocol, which rescue and develop earlier initiatives such as the Earth Charter. There are also some initiatives that are proposing the organization of global action days during the Rio +20 which can and should be articulated at the Forum. In addition, the organization of broad campaigns that will be launched at the Rio+20 should find in the TSF space to be discussed and prepared.

We should also develop initiatives to mobilize the university, scientists, artists and religious leaders to engage in the process of civil society at Rio +20.

We need, finally, to identify key persons publicly recognized who are able to didactically transmit for all the TSF participants the general ideas of the debate that is being made in the thematic groups and in specific initiatives.

In all these cases, we should design a strategic analysis capable of setting a horizon of actions for the following years after Rio +20, where initiatives that emerged from there can be resumed and developed in a new global balance of forces.

The organization of the process. For this broad process of discussion starting in October, the organizers of the TSF will provide an electronic platform for the work of the thematic groups and specific initiatives towards Rio +20. It would also contribute to the coordination of the whole debate until January.

Facilitating networks of thematic groups and specific initiatives towards Rio+20 formed by October, should share with all the participants of the process a concept paper to stimulate their group.

Representatives of the thematic groups and specific initiatives constituted until mid-October 2011 would meet on October 22nd and 23th in an International Seminar on Methodology, to agree the final methodology for the process.

In addition, this International Seminar on Methodology should - always aligned with the Brazilian Civil Society Facilitating Committee for Rio +20 - define the strategy and the crosscutting issues that will stimulate the discussions and the convergence between the thematic groups, in order to overcome the current model and affirm a new paradigm of civilization. The seminar should also define how to systematize the work, after January, towards the next meeting in Rio de Janeiro.

We believe that the Thematic Social Forum in January may be an opportunity for movements and organizations to make an initial summary of their work and to articulate themselves for the great global civil society meeting that will happen between May and June in Rio de Janeiro.

Immediate steps. We have opened, with this document, the process of the TSF through the initial organization of thematic groups (the second Forum's field discussed above). These groups should discuss questions that are related to TSF's agenda; their proponent organizations must have the ability to contribute and provide operational support to the debate in Portuguese, Spanish, English and French; and groups must have an international scope. The organizations and networks that wish to submit proposals should send the theme, the organization responsible for the proposal, its names and address (personal and professional),

as well as the name of the members that will be responsible for monitoring the process to the following email: grupostematicosfst@gmail.com.

At this moment, we will help these groups to organize a dynamic of discussion and provide, until the International Seminar on October 22th and 23th, the first version of a concept note able to guide the debate and the subsequent expansion of the thematic groups. From the Seminar, this debate should be available to those who subscribe in thematic groups in the four languages of the TSF through an electronic platform and a wiki page for the development of documents – if this is the tool for discussion chosen by the group.

The organizations and networks who want to organize initiatives and proposals in the Forum's third field as discussed above may subscribe them by sending an email to grupostematicosfst@gmail.com with the name of the responsible organization and may use the electronic platform to organize its activities. Our purpose is to make an initial systematization of these proposals at the Seminar on October 22th and 23th.

GRAP and Gaúcho Organizing Committee