

# **Road to Dakar: The WSF towards a new emancipatory universality**

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The next global event of the WSF process will take place in Dakar from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 2011. It will follow the latest event in Belem in January 2009 and will deepen and extend its development of a new global transformative culture of politics aimed at catalysing the construction of a better world.

For the first time the WSF will deliberately de-link from the WEF and will take place at a different time. After ten years since its birth it has developed beyond its initial symbolic engagement of the WEF and it now aims towards the more ambitious goal of catalysing social transformation with a vision of a new universality opposed to Western modernism and its current dominant expression, neoliberalism.

In the constant research by the WSF activists of new forms and languages of emancipation, a new sophisticated vision is being suggested by the facilitators of the Dakar forum, which builds on cosmopolitan values and on emancipatory struggles to liberate the poor, the dominated, the exploited, the wretched of the earth from centuries of oppression.

If Western modernity was built on colonialism, slavery, capitalism, imperialism and the hopeful but potentially enslaving thoughts of enlightened philosophers and positivist social scientists, the social movements and the civil society actors convening in the WSF are appropriating a cosmopolitan outlook on life on the planet and are turning it into a new emancipatory universality.

The new universality discussed by the Senegalese facilitators of the next WSF, at the latest meeting of its International Council which gathered in Mexico City on the 5-7 May, will contribute to redefine the foundations of a new culture of politics and a new activist mentality centred on the political recognition of difference and privileging the values of hospitality, conviviality and solidarity against the uncompromising individualism and the dynamics of competition and utility maximisation at the heart of capitalism. The urgency of such emancipatory vision is undeniable and fully expressed by the destructive nature of the current economic, financial, social and environmental crises.

The new universality won't be centred on the integration of the "South" into the "North" but in the radical reformulation of the values that organise society and people's relationships and lives. The cultural inspirations of such vision are gathered from all regions of the world and value diasporic experiences across them. Migrants and women are crucial in contributing to shape the new universality as they are among those most affected by the alienating and atomising practices of capitalism.

The members of the Senegalese delegation presented the vision of the Forum, the strategic axis, the general structure of the programme, the venue, the accommodation opportunities and the mobilisation and organisational process as it will develop in the next months.

The 2011 edition of the WSF will be focused on the symbolic image of the South. A South intended not merely as geographical description but as position in a dominant relation in which one term is made lower through material exploitation, is oppressed politically, marginalised culturally and victimized psychologically.

The Dakar forum will be articulated in three strategic axis. The first will focus on the critical analyses

of the current crises of neoliberalism, as it manifested itself not only in Africa but in the whole planet. The second will highlight the struggles against the effects of the crises, against the actors engaged in perpetuating the behaviours that caused the crises in the first place and against any form of oppression. It will also provide an opportunity to give special stress to the African realities of struggle and transformation with a desire to learn also from the histories of oppression, rebellion and transformation of the African diasporas, the struggles against slavery and the civil rights movement, and to celebrate the independence of the African continent the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of which is for many countries this year. The third axis of encounter and engagement will revolve around imaginations, proposals and developments towards transforming the world society.

Among the questions that will cut across themes and axis there will be the current rush to the African resources, the role in the fierce competition over those resources by new players like China, the geopolitical reconfiguration of the world order, the role of African countries vis-à-vis the American war on terror, the wars affecting the people of some African countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia, possible ways to build and consolidate a solidarity between peoples in the spirit of Bandung, just to mention a few.

There will be also an important stress on African culture, not understood as entertainment but in its most genuine political aspects. In this sense the Senegalese forum will build on past experiences of the WSF in Mumbai, Nairobi, Porto Alegre and Belem. Culture will be shared, enjoyed, performed as part of the new language of struggle and transformation.

To give louder and clearer meaning to the vision of the WSF the Senegalese organisers are stressing the importance to extol the uniqueness and specificity of their process, informed by the unique political and cultural context, but they are also adamant against attempting to assume a hegemonic role within the overall WSF process. The new world ahead will also rely on the new culture of politics that is aware and beware of the negative implications in the long run of processes led by any (even profoundly trusted, loyal and freely chosen) world leadership.

The process towards a new world, a new civilisation, a new activist paradigm has received a new impetus coming from a continent subject to horrendous exploitation and oppression that is prepared now to show that those who have been losers for five centuries can now show the true meaning of hospitality, rally confidence, inspire dignity, ignite transformation. This seems to be at the heart of the vision, centred on an acute sensibility to oppression and assertion, that the members of the Senegalese delegation communicated to their colleagues of the WSF International Committee and that are prepared to communicate to the global activists in the outreach process leading to the February event in Dakar.

Whereas always acutely aware of the condition of oppression and exploitations that are at the heart of social and political activism, the facilitators of the WSF process seem to have put lately a more forceful stress on the transformative potentials of their movement. This new stress is, at the same time, a response to those internal and external perplexities and criticisms, against the potentially complacency of the Social Forum process in its denial to converge towards political activism as some would like and few still request from its spaces.

The stress of the African and Senegalese members of the organising committee for Dakar on the powerful and emancipatory message communicated by the WSF in its current process towards Dakar, sounds convincing, inspiring and exciting. A cry of awareness and a call to rally. The activists gathering in the university campus in Dakar will share their acute awareness of injustice, oppression and exploitation and express their creative energy to confront them. Such a peaceful force could indeed

achieve a lot. It could reinforce the dialogic process of awareness formation among its members and can further reinforce the virtuous cycle of exodus from the shackles of domination towards another, transformed world. Such powerful message is in the vision of the WSF Charter as an aspiration. The Senegalese chapter of the WSF is making that aspiration forcefully present and real in their vision for the next WSF event.

The Dakar event will start on Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup> of February with the official opening and a march along the streets of the Senegalese capital. The following day will focus on Africa and the African diaspora and will see a proactive involvement of the organising committee in defining the programme. The second and third day will revolve around the myriad of self-organised activities. The fourth day will help build moments of thematic convergence and the fifth day will be dedicated to the assembly of assemblies experimented in Belem in 2009.

The process will continue in the next months leading to a technical workshop in Dakar aiming at giving shape to the programme. This effort will involve African organisers and their partners in the Strategy, Methodology and Communication Commissions of the International Council. This joint work should allow to finalise the thematic foci while at the same time launching the agglutination process of the self-organised activities and the registration to the event.