

The Third World Social Forum: “Another World is Possible”

The World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil runs parallel to the yearly World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and attracts tens of thousands of social activists and participants from non-governmental organizations. The event was set up in 2001 to provide an alternative forum for discussion of issues social and environmental issues that are generally left out of the yearly Davos conference. Its motto: “Another world is possible,” reflects the emphasis of developing alternatives to current patterns of globalization.

In 2003, the Third Annual World Social Forum attracted nearly 100,000 participants, including 70,000 official delegates from more than 60 countries and 25,000 young people who participated in the parallel youth camp. This diverse gathering filled the city of Porto Alegre during the last week of January, for an intense week of workshops, lectures, marches, and cultural exchanges. At its core, the Forum offered its delegates the opportunity to exchange ideas about how to make the world a better place for all. Key themes included democracy, sustainable development, human rights, and strategies for making globalization serve the interests of all citizens.

In its first two years, the Forum attracted little attention from community-based groups in the United States. But this year, many different organizations organized delegations. As Angela Sanbrano, Director of the Central American Resource Center in Los Angeles put it, “The Forum gave us an unforgettable opportunity to learn about globalization, trade and other issues that impact us – whether we realize it or not.”

Immigrant Leaders at the Forum

EnlacesAmérica sponsored a delegation of eight Central American and Mexican immigrant community leaders to the World Social Forum as part of its broader efforts to increase the presence of organized Mexican and Central American immigrant voices in international policy debates. People are just beginning to connect the process of globalization with migration, but clearly we need to better understand the links between the two.”

The members of the immigrant leadership delegation included:

Gonzalo Arroyo, Family Focus of Aurora/ Federación de Clubes Michoacanos de IL

Oscar Chacón, EnlacesAmérica/Salvadoran American National Network

Daysi Funes, Centro Romero

Jesus García, Little Village Community Development Corporation, Chicago

Marlon Gonzalez, Guatemalan Unity Info. Agency (GUIA)/CONGUATE, Miami

Adriana Loyola, Asociación Tepeyac, New York City

Angela Sanbrano, Central American Resource Center (CARECEN), Los Angeles

The delegation organized two workshops in Porto Alegre aimed at making the connections between local realities and global trends. In the workshop titled *Global Drops in the Local Ocean*, participants shared their experiences working at the community level, in a world where the ripples from international policies can overwhelm local efforts. In particular, participants worried that global economic integration can contribute to a growing sense of hopelessness in Latin America, particularly in rural areas. Lacking economic opportunities, many families see no other recourse than to migrate to the United States in search of a brighter future.

Mexican and Central American immigrants are rapidly acquiring experience in developing trans-boundary organizations that could be important platforms for promoting new models of integration that take local interests into account. At a presentation on *Emigrant Communities as Agents of Global Citizenship*, Jesus García, Director of the Little Village Community Development Center noted that Mexican immigrants' organizations are revitalizing neighborhoods and cities across the United States, while at the same time coordinating efforts to improve conditions in their localities of origin. He added, "Their daily participation and interest in both societies is making them strategic actors in defining a new kind of global citizenship that advances democracy in all its forms."

The fear of a war in the Middle East permeated many discussions at the World Social Forum, but even as delegates spoke of their concerns, there was a pervading sense of hope for the future. As Daysi Funes, Director of Centro Romero in Chicago commented, "We saw such a diversity of people, from youth, to retired people, peoples from many different countries, and all of them had come together to try to create a better life for their families, their communities and the world."

The motto "Hope Conquered Fear" appeared all over Porto Alegre on buttons, t-shirts and posters. Although it refers directly to the victorious campaign of newly elected Brazilian President Luis Ignacio "Lula" da Silva, this slogan also reflects a more profound sentiment at the World Social Forum that another world is indeed possible and that ordinary citizens want to play a role in moving it from dream to reality.