

**IGNATIAN FAMILY ENCOUNTER AND WORLD SOCIAL
FORUM**

NAIROBI, JANUARY 2007

ENTRECULTURAS

**REPORT ON THE IGNATIAN FAMILY
ENCOUNTER AND THE WORLD SOCIAL
FORUM. NAIROBI**

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1. IGNATIAN FAMILY ENCOUNTER

1. **Dates** 17 – 19 January, 2007.
2. **Place:** Hekima College, Nairobi (Kenya)
3. **Participants:** Around 150 people coming from:
 - Social Sector African Jesuits
 - Hekima College African Jesuit students
 - Social Apostolate from other Assistances: EEUU (4), India (6), East Asia (2), Latin America (5), Europe (3).
 - Xavier Network (10).

4. Encounter Objectives

General objective: to strengthen the Social Apostolate in Africa (*peace and justice work*) and to increase international cooperation with Africa.

Specific objectives:

- (1) to develop the Ignatian perspective (spirituality) or the value framework which has been guiding the Ignatian family's apostolic commitment towards the transformation of individuals and communities; and
2. to strengthen the existing apostolic initiatives for social transformation and to plan an effective partnership and networking among them.

5. Encounter structure

DAYS	SESSION 1	SESSION 2	SESSION 3
	Plenary 08.30-10.30	Workshops 11.00-14.00	Concluding 14:30- 16:30
17 January	<p>Inauguration: Theme 1: Ignatian Contemplation on the Trinity: Source of Our Passion for Justice in the World Today. FR. FRATERN MASAWE</p> <p>Theme 2: Challenges and Opportunities for Africa: A Christian Call to Social Transformation. Dr. David Kaulem (confirmed)</p> <p>Way of Proceeding with the workshop (Methodology). Fr. Groum Tsefaye (10 minutes)</p>	<p>There will be 5 specific workshops:</p> <p>(1) Refugees and Migrants—JRS ANNE WANGARI ken.scholar@jrs.net Tel. No. 3878260</p> <p>(2) HIV/AIDS- AJAN MICHAEL CZERNY mzczerny@jesuits.ca</p> <p>(3) Conflict, War and Peace- Hekima Peace Institute. PAULIN MANUELO manwelop@hotmail.com</p>	<p>Continuation of the discussions and Brief Summary from the Workshops</p> <p>17:00 Mass</p>
18 January	<p>Theme 3: Ignatian Values and Methodology in Addressing Social Issues in Africa. FR. VALERIAN SHIRIMA</p> <p>Theme 4: Ignatian Pedagogy for Societal Transformation. Sr. Ephigenia Gachiri (confirmed)</p>	<p>(4) Debt, Trade and Governance: the international development agenda - IJND MIGUEL GONZALEZ m.gonzalez@alboan.org</p>	<p>Continuation of the discussion and Brief Summary from the Workshops</p> <p>17:00 Mass</p>
19 January	<p>Theme 5: Collaboration within the Ignatian Family and Beyond FR. DONAT BAFUIDINSONI</p> <p>Theme 6: Reflecting on African Experiences in Social Change: Working toward an Ignatian Framework Levi Matseshe, Frs. Turner/Ocipe and Fernando (confirmed)</p>	<p>(5) Management and Depletion of Natural Resources CEPAS & CEFOD FERDINARD MUHIGIRWA muhigirwafsj@yahoo.fr / ANTOINE BERILENGAR dberilengar@yahoo.fr</p>	<p>Steering Committee will lead the groups in a process of prayer and discernment and final summary</p> <p>17:00 Final Mass 18:30 – 20:30 Cultural Evening with Dinner from 19:00</p>
Note: Lunch will be served between 12:30 and 14:00 Tea breaks at 10:30 and 16:30			

6. Main conclusions

6.1. Shared reflections

- **The Ignatian spirituality** drives us to contemplation and to engage in radical actions, with a commitment similar to the “Holy Trinity who decides to send the Second Person for the world’s salvation”¹. The Ignatian spirituality as a starting point, framework and way of action for personal transformation.

¹ Fratern Masawe SJ

- Who tells what history to whom? **The issue of identity.** Africa, the cradle of humanity. The search for self identity which implies recognition and its capacities and limitations. The possibility of Africans to be themselves. The recovery of the dignity and belief in their own salvation. Africa “who loves and hates the modernity implied by the post colonial states.”²
- Therefore, **what image of Africa**, of the Africans (including the Jesuits) are we **transmitting**? The challenge of presenting a more complex, diverse and creative Africa, different from the stereotypes of the exclusively negative and exotic aspects³.
- **Where lies the Africans’ responsibility?** “The lack of a leading elite with ethical responsibility and engagement with its own countries and inhabitants”⁴. More specifically the African Jesuits have the responsibility of thinking and building a new Africa. In this task, colleagues from other countries may be co-responsible⁵.
- Focus on **changes in a global context.** Change our view whenever necessary. Pay, for instance, special attention to the role of China as a new colonial power in Africa. A new form of domination, consequence of a combination of communist dictatorship and the free market with potential problems such as human rights and democracy (not a reason for worry in China); exploitation of natural resources (it is what China looks for most); arms trade (part of what they offer);... They happen to be the two geographic priorities of the SJ. ¿What could be the implications of this?
- The Ignatian family. What does it include? Which are the internal relationships developed within? Who should lead the process? The central role of the spiritual exercises. The Jesuit-laymen relationships.

6.2 Conclusions of the issues addressed in group discussions:

REFUGEES AND FORCED MIGRANTS

The accompaniment as a specific answer of the JRS. Stand with the refugees, listen to them, placing the person at the centre and listening to their truth.

Globalization has favoured international mobility and the exchange of goods (trade); money (finances); culture, information. However, freedom of movement is still restricted (increasingly so). The refugees suffer this tendency to control people’s movements and the differences between refugees and migrants are increasingly unclear.

² Dr. David Kaulem (Zimbabwe)

³ Valerian Shirima SJ

⁴ Valerian Shirima SJ

⁵ Ibidem

Refugee camps as places that limit human rights. Settlements are a more flexible formula, but equally imperfect. Detention camps in developed countries. The need to propose alternatives to improve the situation of refugees, their insertion in the community and dependency limitation. Support the campaign against detention centres, promoted by the JRS together with other organizations.

The need to recover traditional African values, such as hospitality. The refugees who were formerly regarded as guests have now become strangers.

The need to improve articulation with other activities carried out by the Society and Ignatian Family.

HIV/AIDS

Work focused on the training of agents, accompaniment of the sick and reflection.

Debate on AJAN's role regarding its approach to pharmaceutical industries in order to have access to retrovirals.

WAR, PEACE AND CONFLICT SOLUTIONS

To be aware of the grave, complex and diverse conflict situations existing in Africa. Appreciate the advances in peace processes but also recognize the fragility of the progress made.

Look for the deeper causes of conflict: access to natural resources and other economic issues; corruption and lack of engagement of the political elite; fundamentalisms and lack of respect for plurality.

GOVERNANCE, TRADE AND DEBT

Recognize the characteristics of the current neo liberal development model: the reduction of the state, supremacy of the market on all areas of activity; opening of external barriers; reduction of the public expenditure; macro economic adjustments.

Assume the absence of an alternative global model. But continue to influence so that higher social concerns might be incorporated in the model and focus attention on smaller and alternative proposals that advance towards an economy of solidarity. They are not alternative models but small steps forward in specific cases.

The external debt continues to be a central issue in order to attain the development of many countries. The pending questions are: What happens with countries that are now out of the HIPC group?

EXPLOITATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

This is an issue closely linked to the two previous ones. The “bad governance” favours the exploitation of natural resources and the interest for these, forces corrupt governments. This is also one of the deeper causes for armed conflicts.

Which goals can be achieved? Fair compensation, transparency, education of local leaders, good governance. The fundamental question is to try to leave in the country a higher share of the added values generated in the manufacturing process.

The importance of strengthening the role of civil society as watchdog in these processes: capacity building and education are the key issues.

Specific situations: Congo (gold, coltan...); Chad (oil).

6.3 On the Ignatian perspectives of transformation Values

- Search for truth
- Passion and Compassion
- Inner freedom
- Ignatian spirituality. Discernment
- Dialogue
- Sharing with others

Methodology

- Listening to people. Attentively, from the heart. To be where the people are. “To be in exile with exiled people”⁶.
- Accompany. Stand with them, so they can stand up.
- Promote awareness, organization and participation of excluded groups and persons. Pay attention to the dependencies which are generated.
- Reflection. Critical analysis
- Search for transformation
- Networking
- Advocacy

⁶ John Guinney SJ

Proposals

- **Networking**
 - Structure the work of the Society of Jesus in Africa
 - Establish and strengthen relations with other organizations and church and social networks.
- **Advocacy**
 - Present a more realistic and positive image of Africa
 - Accompany advocacy work
 - Need of training and internal capacity building for advocacy work.

2. SOCIAL APOSTOLATE OF THE SOCIETY IN AFRICA

This document tries to show the situation and perspectives of the social apostolate in the different African Provinces. The information comes from the members' meeting of the social apostolate held in Nairobi on January 23, 2007 and from personal meetings with many of those concerned.

The report gathers data and information given by the participants. In some cases, italics are used for comments, evaluations or recommendations for Entreculturadas or other agents.

SOCIAL APOSTOLATE IN JESAM

The Nairobi meeting is the second to take place. Two years ago a similar seminar was held focused at that time on the issues of peace, war and conflict resolutions. The conclusions or recommendations of that meeting were the following:

(Fratern Masawe, African Provincials Coordinator):

- Strengthen existing social structures in the area of peace buildings. As some of the centres were explicitly mentioned by name, it is important for us to hear from them if they have indeed been strengthened. Have you, since then been strengthened: JRS, Hekima Institute of Peace, CERAP, JCTR, Hakimani, CEPAS, Hekima Peace Forum, CEFOD, Silvera House, Arrupe Centre, etc.
- 2.- Establish a JESAM Peace Website (responsibility of JESAM Social Apostolate Co-ordinator) with links to provincial/regional Social Apostolate websites, and develop e-news bulletins.

- International networking and regional solidarity between Jesuits - A directory of social apostolate, data base for the Assistance.
- Training on peace, reconciliation and justice at different levels of formation as well as in apostolic communities. Value oriented formal and popular education on peace-related ministries in parishes, schools, universities etc.
- A theological reflection based on Ignatian Spirituality on the issues of peace and conflict transformation. Research and publication with reliable data.
- Explore the feasibility of appointing a team of African - Madagascan Jesuit experts at AU (Addis Ababa) and EU (Brussels). Be near the decision-maker. How near have we gone?.
- Explore the possibility of an African Peace University - building upon the Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations.
- Establish a follow up committee for peace building and conflict transformation to co-ordinate peace building activities of the JESAM Social Centres - in collaboration with the Social Centres to identify specific needs for immediate, short term and long term. This is yet to be formed, as far as I can remember.
- Other developments emerging? Europe/Africa? Advocacy issues? Poverty?

The majority of these recommendations have not been implemented yet. Some continue to be valuable but others have lost relevance nowadays.

In this level of the African Assistance, there are three initiatives linked to the Social Apostolate

Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS)

The JRS was founded following F. Arrupe's vision of providing special attention to the refugees in the world. The last published figures about the current refugee situation in the world are that some 12 million refugees and 21 million internally displaced exist. East Africa deserves special consideration accounting for 5 million refugees and 8 million internally displaced.

The JRS is structured in four major regions in Africa: East Africa, Great Lakes, West Africa and South Africa. It is present in 18 different countries with special presence in Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and South Sudan.

The work is carried out both at the Refugee Camps and by providing support to the "returned".

JRS priorities:

- **Attention to the 12 million African displaced people.** Defending the human rights of the displaced is even more difficult than that of the refugees. Generally, governments are involved in the drama and NGO access to the displaced is very often not possible. As an example, it is worth mentioning the death of thousands of displaced Congolese due to the absence of basic services.
- **Attention to current African conflicts** such as the conflicts of Somalia, Sudan, Congo and Guinea. Participation in providing solutions to such conflicts.
- **Reconstruction:** As the conflict climate becomes normalized, the JRS participates in education and infrastructure reconstruction projects in close liaison with the local communities. Is it already feasible to work with the local communities in Liberia and Northern Uganda?
- **Education: In Africa education is the main line of JRS service. Education is a human right and a top priority for JRS in Africa. It protects people; it helps them overcome their drama and enables them to participate in the reconstruction of their society. It makes good Nelson Mandela's words, "education is the main weapon to change the world." Some questions arise: How to work more on education? How can one help in the demilitarisation of education?**

The recognition of the JRS work in Africa is very high due to its quality, its presence in border line situations, its advocacy capacity... However it is necessary to strengthen its relationship with the social sector in particular and the Provinces in general. To stimulate projects and joint initiatives should be a priority. A higher participation of African Jesuits in the JRS would also be advisable.

Hekima Institute for Peace

Hekima Institute for Peace is an institute located in Nairobi. It has been recently created for the study of peace keeping and conflict resolutions. Its main role is to provide a master programme and additionally other courses, lectures etc. They also organize student outings to the “field.”

Since four months ago, it has a Congolese Director. By the end of 2007, it is foreseen to have an Institute separated from Hekima College. The problem of still been located at Hekima College is that in certain times of the year all classrooms are used and there is lack of space. Currently this new building is under construction. Any contribution will be most welcome.

Currently, the Institute has limited resources and there are a small number of students. Not more than 10 or 12 per year in a two year master programme. However, the resolution of conflicts and the formation of peace agents are considered a central priority in Africa. Currently, there is certain hope for the resolution of some African conflicts:

- Peace Agreement in Sudan, January 2005
- Peace Agreement in North Uganda
- Tanzania: The greatest challenge is the return of all the refugees coming from Burundi, Rwanda and Congo.

The collaboration of the Institute with the JRS is considered of utmost importance. The JRS works mainly in education but up to now not much has been done in conflict resolution.

Additionally the Hekima Peace Forum has been founded. This is a joint reflection group created in 1999 by theology students at Hekima College.

The most underlying aspect according to Elias Omondi is to **strengthen the coordination between the Peace Institute and the JRS.**

AJAN (Michael Czerny SJ)

The first thing to point out is that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is urgent but still a very new phenomenon. Although HIV/AIDS appeared 25 years ago, society only considered it a serious problem 10 or 15 years ago. It is important to approach this issue with patience. When AJAN assumes its mission of fighting against HIV AIDS in Africa, it does so with a time line of 100 years. It would not be realistic to set a shorter time objective.

It is also important to consider that HIV is not an emergency which must be looked after, but part of life itself in Africa and work must be done in the Africans’ day to day. Fortunately the Jesuits are well positioned to do this. It is being carried out very seriously and with many able and trained persons implied.

The question which is raised when trying to position AJAN in the framework structure of the Society, is it education, pastoral, social? From our point of view, VHS must be a transversal theme across all sectors because it is evident that it is not just a medical problem but one which has broad repercussions in all areas of activity.

It is important to consider that AJAN is a network that provides services to all members of the African Assistance who work with AIDS. Therefore, when a Jesuit asks, “why doesn’t AJAN get involved in the study and research of medical treatments and access to medicines?” The answer of AJAN is, “great, do it and we will support you.”

Recently, AJAN has evaluated its work. This has been a decision taken by its director considering it is the adequate moment because it will help with fund raising. It is recognised that perhaps more people should have participated in this evaluation. The results of this work are summarised as follows:

- Given that the developed initiatives are so insignificant in relation to the size of the problem, we must strengthen our presence in those in which we are working without trying to reach out too much.
- Inform governments and NGOs on what AJAN is and does in a more transparent way.
- It is important to start developing serious advocacy work, something which has still not begun. It is still full of uncertainties and it is not yet clear what kind of work will be carried out in his area.
- Jesuit formation. Important efforts have been made regarding the formation of Jesuits on HIV/AIDS but we still have to continue insisting in this aspect.

AJAN seems to be consolidating and expanding as a network initiative related to HIV/AIDS. Its structure and functioning is different from JRS and it grants greater autonomy to each initiative. Likewise, more connections and links are demanded with the social sector and other works. This should be a priority.

2.SOCIAL APOSTOLATE IN THE AFRICAN PROVINCES AND REGIONS.

Social Apostolate in South Africa (Peter Knox SJ)

In this Province we work in Parishes, Universities and Institutes run by other religious orders. We need our own institute. The South African Jesuit Institute has been created and the official inauguration will take place in February 2007. As of today, 8 people work at the Institute. An expert in theology, one on social issues, three or four experts in Ignatian Spirituality, a philosopher and an expert in Institutional Development. The Institute is located provisionally at the Johannesburg Parish but we are aiming at having a separate building within a year and a half.

One of the goals of the Institute is to bring together, on different issues, the great number of NGOs that operate in South Africa. One of the planned activities is the weekly launch of a social theme in the web in order to learn what the position of the South African society is on that particular issue.

A major concern of the Province is the progressive disappearance of hope in the South African society. Even though South Africa has carried out a major political transformation in the last two decades, the economic transformation is proving much more difficult and will probably last several generations. In spite of major efforts by the government to empower the poor with education etc. not much progress is being seen in this direction. The Institute will deal not only with problems specific to the South African society, but also and perhaps more importantly, with the feelings of this society which is slowly losing its hope.

Social Apostolate in West Africa (Antoine Berilengar SJ)

The Society of Jesus is present in 9 countries in the West African Province, all of which are Francophone, although the number of countries in the Province is much bigger.

There are four fundamental challenges in this Province:

1. Health Area. It is necessary to respond in two different ways
 - a. By building hospitals or health centres.
 - b. With education for the prevention and treatment of HIV/ AIDS. This is a priority. A pilot centre has been created in Togo. There are many Jesuits working in this field. In many cases, the initiatives are individual but always extremely useful.
2. Political area.

There is great difficulty in the transition from traditional societies to political societies. One of the consequences of this great difficulty is war. Many of the countries in the Province are at war. Our responsibility is to provide formation and insist on the dialogue and the use of non violent methods to solve conflicts. The work towards conflict resolutions demands close connection with international communities. The solution is not going to come only from internal efforts. Furthermore, the work regarding the post conflict situation is also very demanding.
3. Development

The key question on this point continues to be how to achieve that the exploitation of natural resources in the region may mean an improvement in the life quality of the population instead of a loss of such level of life as it has been happening and continues to happen currently.
4. Empowerment of individuals and local institutions. Mainly through formation. In some countries, to connect with local parishes continues to be a real challenge. In this context the West Africa Synod represents an opportunity to extend work towards peace and reconciliation among all parishes. Great work is being carried out in this area but the fundamental difficulty lies in the lack of human and financial resources.

5. Networking with JRS, AJAN and Social Centres. This is proving to be very difficult. An issue to resolve is that all leaders of these Institutions are always occidental. In the West Africa Province, there are no local people working at these Institutions. How can African Jesuits become part of them?.

The most important social centre in the Province is probably CEGOD, located in Chad. It works actively in many of the above mentioned fields.

Central Africa (Ferdinand Muhigirwa SJ)

Work in Congo D.R. is focused around the following areas:

- Refugees
- Social and Political Education
- Massive Media Communication.
- Governance focused on Natural Resources.
- Peace, Education and Natural Resources Advocacy.
- Jesuit Formation.

The most significant social Institution is CEPAS. It works in various fields, reflection and analysis, communication, (they publish one of the most prestigious magazines of social and political analysis) formation of leaders, political advocacy (fundamentally active in the exploitation of natural resources in East Congo) and adviser to other NGO.

Two proposals in order to increase the coordination of the various institutions within the Assistance.

- To include the Social Apostolate coordinators in the JRS directors meetings
- To establish periodical coordination meetings between the main Assistance organizations:
 - o AJAN
 - o SJR
 - o Social Apostolates

Madagascar (Jean Simon Ratsimbazafy SJ)

Although there are no wars in Madagascar and the official figures of HIV are very low, the truth is that it is a very poor country. Some relevant data on Madagascar:

- Great immigration from people coming from China who occupy local jobs.
- Non human labour conditions.
- 80% of the population continue to be peasants.

- The official statistics on HIV/AIDS are false. The index of penetration of the pandemic in Madagascar is much greater than what the statistics say.
- There are a great number of foreign companies for the exploitation of natural resources in the South East of Madagascar.

It is necessary to foster political advocacy against the socialist government which has not achieved much in the fight against poverty.

The province of Madagascar is currently made up of 19 districts, 17 dioceses, 3 universities, 4 technical training Institutes and a Health Centre.

One of the main centres in the Province is the Arrupe Social Centre whose mission is the coordination of all social Apostolate activities in Madagascar, the collaboration with laymen and politicians and the formation and awareness raising of leaders and research.

Mozambique (Miroslaw Matyja SJ)

A strategic plan for the Social Sector has been carried out

The priorities set in this plan for the Province are the following:

1) Education:

- Strengthen relations with States, NGOs and other Institutions.
- Increase institutional presence in the old schools of the Society which were nationalized even though they will never be recovered by the Society.
- Rehabilitate and build new schools
- Improve teacher selection. There is a will to provide quality education for the poor and excluded persons. It is also intended to emphasize on the moral education.
- Maintain and incentive the presence of Jesuits in the education sector.
- Improve the quality of libraries

2) Development

- Promotion of sustainable projects, especially agricultural projects.
- Emphasis on projects directed to strengthen family and local community.
- Promotion of civic values in particular the defence of women and children's rights.

3) HIV/AIDS

- Strengthen work in association with NGOs. The work carried out with “Médicos Sin Fronteras”, some government organizations and most importantly the work with AJAN is especially relevant. HIV/AIDS related work in the Province is unthinkable without support from AJAN.
- Formation and information on prevention issues regarding HIV/AIDS

4) Health:

- Support for mothers and children
- Promotion of basic health care for children, mothers and youth.
- Fight against malaria, cholera and other illnesses.

Other aspects to be analyzed:

- The collaboration of laymen and women in the Province. In November 2006, a Jesuit and a lay woman from the Gonzalo da Silveira NGO were murdered. This is a sign of the times in which this Province now lives. Something new that we have to deal with.
- Underline the collaboration with Gonzalo da Silveira and the Xavier Network.
- Due to the poor formation on social matters, many young Jesuits refuse social work which they consider very hard. This year the Province will have 12 new novices and we think it is important that they would be ready to work in the social sector and have the necessary formation to do so.
- The question is raised as to why only one representative can come to this social apostolate meeting.

The support provided by the Xavier network has been very positively valued. The relationship which has been established and the technical, human and economic support which has been provided for the development of the strategic plan have strengthened enormously the links among the organizations.

Rwanda and Burundi (Emmanuel Uwamungu SJ)

The region has the following main characteristics:

- Very close work with JRS: three refugee camps in Rwanda and one in Burundi.
- One orphanage.
- One secondary school.

Priorities of the Province:

1. Peace and reconciliation
2. Education. There is one school in Bujumbura, there are plans to build one in Rwanda.

3. Compassion: In order to rebuild a country one has to begin by rebuilding people's hearts.
4. Reflection: articles on the genocide.
5. Formation of Jesuits for Social Apostolate
6. Solving the problem of human and financial resources because its scarcity makes the work extremely difficult.
7. A great job is being done in pastoral. The state needs this type of work in order to rebuild individuals after the genocide.
8. Very close work with the JRS due to the presence of Congolese refugees in Rwanda.
9. HIV/AIDS

Zambia and Malawi (Charles Chilufya SJ)

Some relevant data about Zambia:

In the 70s and 80s, mines were owned by the state. The country indebted itself in excess during the 70s fostered by the attractive loans provided by the oil producing countries during the oil crisis of the 70s. After requesting the support from the World Bank and the IMF, a neo liberal policy was imposed which included among other measures the privatization of all state owned companies. This is how all the mines in the country went from the state to private hands. During the 90s, the excessive accumulated debt was reduced in successive negotiations. Currently 95% of Zambia's debt has been condoned thanks to the Jubilee 2000 international campaign.

The following activities are carried out in the Province:

- Promotion of family based agricultural production methods.
- Work with refugees, JRS
- Cultural Centre. The intention is to search for Zambia's traditional values and reflect how these values are inserted in current society.
- Agricultural formation. Efforts to expand the use of new agricultural methods.
- Health
- Jesuit Centre for theological reflection with three objectives:
 - o Advocacy
 - o Socio economic challenges in the country
 - o Analysis of current government policies, especially those with the worst adverse impact on the lives of the poor and excluded persons.
- Production activities.

Challenges of the Province.

- Human resources. More Jesuits are needed. For example Meter Henriot is the only Jesuit dedicated to advocacy issues and therefore when he leaves this activity will stop.
- The majority of social works are run by foreign Jesuits with the obvious problem of sustainability. There are not enough local Jesuits dedicated to the Social sector.

3. Some results of the World Social Forum 2007 held in Nairobi, Kenya, from January 20 - 25, 2007.

I. - Introduction

In a world where one of the gravest problems is the inequality between people, aggravated by globalization, strong civil movements arise that question the current economic model which drives part of the world population to hunger and despair.

As an outcome of these movements, the World Social Forum (WSF) has become a sort of Mecca for all those in search of a fairer world under the motto “Another world is possible”. It comprises an amalgamation of organizations, big and small, international and local, belonging to very different ideologies; social movements, base communities, trade unions, and many dissenting groups.

As indicated in its charter of principles, the WSF is a democratic space of ideas, discussion and articulation by the main civil society organizations searching for concrete solutions to the challenges facing the building of another world based on the principles of justice, equity and respect of human rights, where, thanks to a more humane globalization, the economy will be at the service of people.

In its origins, the WSF was a counter point to the Davos Economic Forum. Nowadays it has transcended Davos since, with a wider objective, it aims to visualize the concerns, hopes and alternatives of civil society.

Organized for the first time in 2001 in Porto Alegre, Brazil, the Forum has held further editions in Porto Alegre (2002 y 2003), Bombay, India (2004), Porto Alegre (2005), polycentric in 2006 (in Bamako, Mali, Karachi, Pakistan and Caracas, Venezuela). In this last edition, the WSF was held in Nairobi, Kenya, between January 20 to 25, 2007 assembling more than 40.000 participants from all over the world.

2. Positive and negative aspects of the WSF (from our personal impressions)

A. Positive Aspects.

1. The celebration of this edition in Africa. The decision, taken in 2004, to celebrate the 2007 edition in Africa was due to strategic reasons: the will to take a further step in the globalization of the Forum, already taken in 2004 with the celebration in Bombay, India, and to show at least during a few days, the diversity and cultural richness of the continent as well as the richness of its organizations and social movements. The aim was to show Africa as it really is which does not always correspond to the image presented on many occasions either plagued by conflicts or with exotic trends.

At the same time, as in previous editions, the African delegation was merely representative. The aim was that the African presence, its voices, concerns and specifically African themes, would have a stronger presence.

In spite of some deficiencies, this presence has been successful at large. If the Forum has had European and Western assistants, the African presence has been a clear majority.

Foto: Jorge Serrano/Entreculturas

2. The specific treatment of issues especially relevant for the African continent.

At the World Social Forum, there is a broad variety of workshops, seminars, round tables and varied activities. In this edition, more than 200 were held daily organized and managed by registered organizations. A great number of issues were analyzed, many of which had been treated in previous forums, such as the problem of external debt, the reform of multilateral institutions, gender and many others. Some issues seemed to us that were treated with a greater degree of relevance than in other editions, supposedly because of its relevance for Africa, such as peace, the solving of conflicts, AIDS, the exploitation of natural resources, refugees, migration, water or even the Chinese presence in Africa. The future of the WSF was one of the main issues discussed mainly because of the crossroads point in which it currently finds itself.

Finally we would like to point out the Jesuit Network organized a seminar of three hours duration called "Social Transformation in Africa: ethical aspects". In this seminar, various conclusions were presented on issues previously discussed during the encounter related to refugee problems, AIDS, conflicts and their causes, exploitation of natural resources, commerce and characteristics that should define political advocacy.

As in Bombay, although not as clearly marked, there were two complementary forums. One on discussion, internal debate or exchange of experiences, which took place in

closed areas in the Moi Sports Stadium and the more external colourful manifestations such as live expressions, demonstrations, demands, outdoor theatre, music, regional costumes. Folklore and apparently, but only apparently, leisure activities behind which were the suffering and demands for people's rights to a dignified life.

3. Live and visible religion presence.

Some may consider it positive, others negative, others indifferent; but one the most surprising thing for us was the clear and visible presence of individuals and groups linked to religious institutions. Not only the Catholic Church, which through Caritas and many other institutions had a very strong presence, but also Evangelist Churches and Muslim communities had their space. This leads us to reflect if total secularization is mostly a western phenomenon.

4. Live and vibrant women presence.

In workshops and round tables, as participants or attending, in manifestations or demands, in the opening and closing ceremonies, women had a relevant role in this World Social Forum, maybe as their relevant presence and meaning in the African continent.

5. Possibility of net articulation. Maybe one of the greatest possibilities the Forum offers is the capacity to articulate different nets on issues and common agendas. This is neither easy nor spontaneous. But we find a significant example to be followed in the South Asian People's Initiative net, which holds more than 200 organizations of marginal populations in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. They were formed by the Jesuits prior to the Bombay Forum and since then, work together on various issues. A SAPI Delegation of 60 people was present at the forum with very active participation, both in organizing the seminars, presenting, sharing and offering solutions for the issues that worry them (the untouchable Dalit situation, globalization effects etc.) as in public demonstrations, outdoor theatres etc. They were everywhere. The SAPI example is very significant and could be reproduced trying to facilitate people's union on common issues throughout the various continents.

B. Negative Aspects. (From our personal impressions)

1. An organization with deficiencies. In our opinion there were many shortcomings and deficiencies. Seminars and workshops closed or postponed at the last minute without previous warning, speakers who did not show up, rooms with no adequate material and a certain degree of chaos characterized this WSF, although the situation improved as the days passed. Nonetheless, it could not be compared to other editions and it was not a minor problem. However, these are the set backs due to the lack of experience in organizing these events, which were not backed as they were in Porto Alegre, by the municipality or the public authorities.

2. The African presence, although relevant, was not one of social movements or community or poor people's organizations. As stated above, there was a clear African presence. However it was not evident that it represented marginal or poor communities.

This may have been due in part to a lower mobilization like in other editions such as Bombay, a less degree of social structure in the African continent or the high transportation and accommodation cost. The price for the entrance tickets was high for Kenyan standards as was the food and drinks available. This was highly criticized and on the third day they allowed free entrance.

3. Where is the World Social Forum headed? Is there certain saturation?

The number of participants in this Nairobi edition, around 40.000, has been significantly lower than in other editions. In Bombay, for example and in Porto Alegre there were more than 100.000. Is this due to high cost, a lower social network or certain WSF saturation? It is true that the Forum has been decentralized, that there are other regional and thematic forums and success must not be necessarily measured by numbers, but we still think that the question is relevant and that the risk of saturation exists. This is closely related to one of the points debated in this edition, regarding to the future of the forum.

Undoubtedly, from its first meeting, the Forum exceeded all expectations as to the number of participants and its geographical expansion. It is also unquestionable that it has transcended the Davos Economic Forum, which, on those very days, gathers prominent leaders of the world's economy. It is equally true that a number of the Forum's demands have come to form part of the political agenda and have become a worldwide reference. As Bonaventura de Sousa puts it: "The international institutions and other power-holding authorities, in recent years, have been obliged to take into account proposals and demands made at the WSF". Nonetheless, after a few editions, the Forum is now going through a bad patch with regard to its future and this has given rise to intense debate. As Sami Nair, an Egyptian intellectual and one of the leaders of the Forum of Alternatives, points out: "The World Social Forum has played an important role, but it is a system that is beginning to wear out".

Must the Forum remain, as its charter of principles indicates, a democratic venue for ideas, in-depth reflection, formulation of proposals and a link between civil society organisations without issuing documents, joint declarations or taking collective steps? Or must it, on the contrary, make stronger proposals and take collective steps? What is sure is that, almost from its beginning, that question has been intensely debated between those who consider that the Forum, given the huge diversity of the organisations that attend it, should be an encounter and space for dialogue, and those who want it to take unique stands, issue joint documents and carry out collective actions. That question and that debate come up at every Forum with increasing urgency.

It is not easy to answer those questions without knowing what might be the most adequate solution. What seems certain, however, as Roberto Savio, member of the organising Committee pointed out, is that the Forum's success cannot be measured by the criteria of the number of participants or geographical expansion alone; more importantly, we must ascertain that it is contributing to the building of that other world that it proclaims.

III. BRIEF SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE OUR PARTICIPATION.

The Society of Jesus has a firm commitment to be present at these kinds of events and to support network and collaboration with others as shown by the numerous documents of the Social Apostolate. At Entreculturas we are also persuaded of the importance of networking and participating in these events as stated in our institutional documents. The engagement to participate, to the extent of our possibilities, is clear, because in spite of its deficiencies and question marks, the Forum represents nowadays one of the most important movements in favour of justice.

In fact EC has already participated in various editions of the Forum with a positive evaluation. It is highly relevant that we participate in the Forum integrated in an international delegation of the Jesuit net. It is therefore a matter of improving the quality of our presence.

Some brief suggestions:

- We consider highly positive to use the Social Forum in order to have a prior meeting that in this case has yielded very positive results. It would be highly recommendable to replicate this model, if it were possible, on other occasions. We would simply suggest a better connection between the meeting-encounter and the Forum itself.
- In addition to participating as a delegation, it is critical to count with a more developed agenda, as a delegation or by theme. What this is all about is to have better defined and specific objectives, when participating in the forum, about what we want, whom we want to contact and what we want to achieve. It is important to define and work on this agenda ahead of time.
- We also value very positively to develop activities such as seminars, workshops etc. It is important to know what we can offer added value on. The ethical perspective for instance could be an interesting option as it was suggested at the seminar. In case of organizing certain activities it is very important to programme and announce them ahead of time, with an adequate diffusion and inviting our contacts. We also consider relevant to have speakers from base communities.
- It would be good to have our own stand for visibility purposes, handing out materials, explaining our activities and having a place to meet and to be met. The example of SAPI is interesting and highly relevant regarding the formation of networks and base communities. It would be good to get to know it better and to replicate it as far as possible. This shows the Society's possibilities of coordinating and putting in contact people from base communities, between countries or continents, on common subjects.



For more information, see the following web sites:

Social Justice Secretariat: <http://www.sjweb.info/sjs/>

World Social Forum, oficial webpage : <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br/>

