

'WSF had a prophetic voice'

Walden Bello interviewed Aljazeera

Walden Bello has attended every World Social Forum. He is a senior analyst at Focus on Global South, president of the Freedom from Debt Coalition and a professor at the University of the Philippines. As the WSF was winding down in Belem in Brazil, Al Jazeera's Gabriel Elizondo spoke with Bello about his thoughts on this year's meeting.

Al Jazeera: How has the 2009 World Social Forum different from the past years'?

Bello: This represents the triumph of the World Social Forum over the World Economic Forum.

Basically I think that what the forum has been standing for is the strong critique of neo-liberalism and warning the world of the kinds of difficulties neo-liberalism was bringing to the world.

And I think that now this economic crisis has really shown that we had a prophetic voice. A consistent voice of critique that was being put forward.

And what has happened now is in fact the sum of our fear, but at the same time I think that the WSF held out a hope; a hope that there could be a different world from the kind of neo-liberal capitalism world that Davos represented.

And I think that people are now looking to the World Social Forum more than ever for the kinds of alternatives that we need, to be able to restructure the world now that neo-liberalism has failed, now that capitalism is in severe crisis, now that the whole system has lost its legitimacy.

This voice that thousands here have represented now is a voice that is going to be heard all around the world as articulating the possibility of a different world.

How do you respond to people who say the World Social Forum does not provide any solutions?

I think there are a number of very strong themes that have emerged over the last few years.

One is that there must be strong controls and regulations over the market. We have consistently held that belief.

Two, that globalisation was creating a very fragile world and that we needed to be able to make more independent economies, to make internal markets the drivers of development, rather than the global market. Also that we needed controls on transnational corporations.

Bello says people are now looking to the WSF more than ever before [EPA]

We have always held that democracy was very central. That economic democracy, that participatory democracy, enterprises, at the level of economic decision making, people should be able to intervene and make decision on what kind of industries should be developed.

Democracy, equity, the globalisation, regulation: these are all the ideas that we have stood for. We have always said we did not stand for any one model.

This uni-model line of thinking was one of the problems and we have basically said that the way that the principles of an economy would be put together would be different in different countries.

And so I think that the people who said we have nothing to offer have not listened to what we have been saying all along.

Is this the year the World Social Forum could be seen as an equal partner in the exchange of ideas to the World Economic Forum?

I think we have been in a struggle with Davos for the last 9 years. And I think this represents a triumph of the World Social Forum over Davos. And I think these are two very different kinds of forums.

Here is where ordinary people, citizens, people that are marginalised come. This is a search for alternatives from below.

And Davos has represented the failure of the kind of the neo-liberal, technocratic, market driven, corporate driven, politics from above.

So I think that Davos is exhausted, it is dead, and the World Social Forum and related forums represent the areas where we should really be looking for alternatives at this point in time.

And I think any peoples in government and other sectors are going to look at the kinds of things being discussed at the WSF, because the formulas from Davos no longer work.