

Man With A Plan: An interview with one of Asia's leading critics of globalization

By Francis Calpotura

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Walden Bello is one of the leading critics of the current model of economic globalization, combining the roles of intellectual and activist. As a human rights and peace campaigner, academic, environmentalist, and journalist, he has made a major contribution to the international case against corporate-driven globalization.

In 1995, he co-founded the Focus on the Global South, a Bangkok-based research and advocacy organization, of which he is now executive director. Bello is the author or editor of 12 books, including the recently-released *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*. The Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* recently called Bello "the most respected anti-globalization thinker in Asia."

Francis Calpotura caught up with Walden Bello at his office at the University of the Philippines where he is a professor of sociology and public administration.

How did you first become involved in the World Social Forum?

We are one of the founding groups of the World Social Forum. When the first WSF idea was proposed in 2000, Focus on the Global South was asked to join the process, and we jumped on it. We felt the idea of bringing together a counter to Davos was very important. We had a very different view of where the world should be going. We were for liberation, they were for control.

Some see the World Social Forum as part of a series of historical initiatives by countries from the Global South that puts forward an alternative to existing economic and political arrangements, much like the Non-Aligned Movement of the 1950s and liberation movements of the past 50 years. Is this an accurate description of WSF's roots and inspiration?

Yes,

I think that the idea of having a site where people who represent a wide variety of movements that have been alienated by capitalist-driven globalization could meet and share ideas, affirm themselves, express solidarity and feel that they are part of a global movement. The solidarity aspect of the WSF is very important.

The resistance

aspect is important as well. At the WSF, you have movements who are concretely fighting the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO—the WSF becomes the site where the planning for the next moves in the campaign against the WTO, the IMF, and the U.S. war effort takes place.

What

inspiring alternatives are coming out of these discussions and what are the prospects of these taking root in the global arena?

Finally,

the alternatives—the thinking and the sharing of ideas—about how we structure economies and states differently at the local, national, and international levels blossom at the WSF. This exchange is critical in advancing our collective vision for a new global economic order.

Ideally,

there will be a meeting of the minds about a vision of what an alternative economic system looks like. But, of course, this rarely happens. Are there tensions between civil societies from the global South and those from the North about strategies to employ or visions to uphold?

Yes, of course. At the start, there were tensions between Northern-based civil society groups and Southern groups. Many Southern groups initially felt that some of the groups in Europe was driving the agenda too much. There was a sense among many that the European and Latin American presence in the WSF was too strong and the presence of groups from Asia and Africa was quite weak. So people said, “How can we talk about the World Social Forum when you had very few people coming from Asian and African nations?”

There

were also tensions between NGOs, social movements, and political parties—the NGOs and social movements come from different political and organizing traditions from political parties, many of whom come from more socialist, communist, or Marxist perspectives of organizing. People were wary that political parties had too prominent a role in the WSF. But folks also felt very comfortable that a new type of political party was central to the WSF, which is the Worker’s Party of Brazil. Well, there is a sense anyway that the Worker’s Party of Brazil is a marriage between a political party and social

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