

## Concept Note

# All India Thematic Social Forum: On Dignity, Diversity and Democracy

**31 July and 1st of August 2016, Hyderabad**

Another India is needed- together it's possible!

**WSF 2016** will be held in Montreal, Canada in August 9th to 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016. People's movements, NGOs, policy activists, thinkers will converge from different parts of the world to exchange information, devise strategies, create networks and platforms to build alternatives to capitalism and neo liberal globalization, and seek solutions to social injustices. The issues facing us all are global in nature and need global solutions, solidarities and perspectives. Hence the need for people and peoples movements to come together and become part of the global discourse and solidarities.

13 years ago, on Jan 2-7, 2003, the **Asian Social Forum** was organized in Hyderabad, on the Nizam College grounds. It was the first Social Forum event in Asia. Organized around the slogan of **"Another World is Possible!"** the focal issues of the Forum were imperialist globalization, religious and sectarian violence, casteism and patriarchy. The Asian Forum saw the participation of over 20,000 people and it prepared the ground for the even bigger mobilization of more than 100,000 at the WSF IV in Mumbai. In November 2006 an Indian social forum event was held in Delhi. After the WSF IV in Mumbai, the WSF went back to Brazil, and then Senegal, and twice to Tunisia. This year Hyderabad will host an **All India Thematic Social Forum on Dignity, Diversity and Democracy on July 31 and 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2016.**

In one part of the world, the Eurozone is in crisis and banks are pushing the burden on to the shoulders of common people through austerity measures. Welfare and benefits of working people as well as their safety nets are severely impacted. In the South, we have rampant privatization and control of corporate companies and banks, the attempt to break down national sovereignty to facilitate corporate exploitation of dwindling natural resources, destruction through indiscriminate mining, building, damming, and cutting down of forests. Conflict and war rage all over the globe; the only beneficiaries being the huge arms corporations, with their own private armies and control over the foreign policies of many governments. The crisis links people in the South and North, and creates the need for a real solidarity of the South, of the common working people world over.

In India, the state is creating conditions for better corporate management. The ruling elite markets Brand India to global capital: its industry, technology, market friendliness and natural resources. The economic ascendance of India has meant increased economic disparities, more state repression and denial of human rights and the ruthless exploitation of peoples and natural resources in the name of development, investment and profits. There is an atmosphere of fear and repression against dissenting views, in particular against religious minorities, Dalits and tribals and sexual minorities. Students, teachers, social movements and NGOs, and all those who believe in a secular state and a pluralistic society are targeted. The threat to Idea of India as a diverse, multi-cultural society are real and have serious implications for our collective future. The new Idea of India based on Hindu nationhood is essentially exclusive and negates the concept of diversity.

But the people of India are resisting. New voices, new movements are providing hope. A new social revolution, with the message of social justice, has begun to rise from the campuses, from the wadas, and the bastis of this country. It is a voice of the young, it is a voice of power and confidence and it will change the face of Indian polity. It is also a voice of women, enraged by the violence they are subjected to in public spaces, in colleges, in the street, inside the home and family; by the hypocrisy and double standards which define Indian patriarchy.

In the rapidly changing economic political and social scenario in India, the need for a broad discourse reflecting the huge diversity of political and social realities is urgently needed. While corporate interests and right wing, communal sectarian forces are gaining strength, solidarity among people's movements is lagging behind, leaving a gap which constitutes a danger to the effectiveness of all people's movements.

In a multi- cultural country, diversity and differences on political positions, strategies and tactics are unavoidable. Yet should this reality become a stumbling block in coming together to meet the current situation, and the dangers inherent therein? How do we meet the challenge of building solidarity based on diversity? How do we forge broader alliances before events overtake democratic and progressive people's movements? There are still many issues that are yet unresolved, among the liberal and left organizations too, amongst ourselves, particularly issues related to social identity, caste and gender politics as well as the questions of democracy, especially internal democracy.

Earlier social forum processes have proved to be extraordinarily popular, as an open space where activists come together, reflect, listen, debate, without

having to agree with each other: from people's movements, NGOs, political parties, cultural groups, trade unions, women's organisations, dalit and indigenous movements. Alliances have been formed, experiences shared, strategies formulated, ideas exchanged, friendships established.

The thematic forum is a small step, using the energy and the principles of the social forum, towards creating a broad solidarity of all forces that are fighting for dignity, diversity and democracy, of all those who believe that such solidarities are the need of the hour.

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