

## Meeting Summary

# Future activism, social movements and the World Social Forum in times of COVID-19

Monday, 30. March 2020 (14:00-15:30 Oslo time)



Hosted by: Norwegian Social Forum, Karibu Foundation, Norwegian Peace Council

Part of the “Viral Open Space / Digital Social Forum”

Meeting info: <https://www.facebook.com/events/248575599651392/>

*Participants: 45 participants in and out of the meeting from Asia, Latin America, Africa, Middle East, Europe, North America*

### Key reflections of potential convergence from the conversations:

- The global COVID-19 crisis is not necessarily a result of the system, but it undoubtedly shows the flaws of the current neoliberal system (and is made worse by the flaws in the system).
- Groups that are already marginalized are those hardest hit (migrants, lower income, those with precarious labor situations, daily wage labourers, homeless communities, those living under occupation, countries with weaker health systems, etc). Many countries in the South are waiting for the slow wave of destruction to hit them, if it hasn't happened already.
- There is a strong sense of urgency. Yet, simultaneously, movements are feeling fragmented and in “limbo,” and are not sure what will come next. There is a need to keep movements communicating and supporting each other globally through the crises.
- The crisis is also providing us with a window of opportunity to come together, exactly because this is a crisis that affects us globally. The flaws in the current system and the common experience of urgency creates a room for mobilization. By helping reveal the many flaws of the current system, many people are already being incentivised to rise up.
- Certain governments (in both the North and the South) are taking advantage of the crisis to consolidate more power and control (socio-economically, technologically, politically, control of information and news, militarily).
- The crisis has moved us quickly to change societies (economically, environmentally, socially, politically). On the other side, there are potentially better systems. Or potentially even more dangerous systems. It is now we need to begin to act and be on alert in order to work towards a more just and solidarity-based societies.

- Technology will be a key in keeping movements together through this, yet there are many risks with our current technology, among others dependency on global corporations and control of data. There need to be open source options that are strong enough to assist us in building movements in online spaces that can also affect change.

**Agenda and minutes:**

13.55	<b>Room opens</b>
14.02	<b>Welcome message</b> on behalf of Norwegian Social Forum, Karibu Foundation, and Norwegian Peace Council - via Ole Pedersen
14.02	<p><b>Technological information:</b></p> <p>Apologies that the meeting will be English only. You can “raise your hand” in the system to be called upon. For any technical issues, Tyler is happy to help. You can contact him directly in the chat</p>
14.04	<p><b>Framing of the meeting:</b></p> <p>Grew out of conversations at the 2019 Norwegian Social Forum “Middle year” forum, where we discussed the future of the World Social Forum movement.</p> <p>Current COVID-19 crisis provided an important movement to discuss with friends globally, about the particular circumstances in many countries and how it connects everyone. We want to know what this mean for social movements. Can these times of social isolation also be used for social and global networking?</p> <p>Main work will be in <b>small groups</b>. Questions we will discuss in the small groups:</p> <p>How do we understand the current crisis? Should we understand this as a profound systemic failure of a neoliberal system, in the same way as we have come to understand the climate crisis? Can we understand this as a moment stressing that “another world” is urgent and not merely possible as we have come to know it from the expression often cited as the slogan of the WSF; Another world is possible? As countries close down and economies crash, could this also mean new opportunities for social movements? Are there different analyses of the situation in the Global South and the Global North? And should we fear that neoliberal forces will use this crisis to tighten their grip on global finances and organization through disaster capitalism that has been so eloquently described by author and activist Naomi Klein in the book <i>The shock doctrine</i>?</p>

14.13

**Brief introductions from around the world:**

**Opening statement from Carminda Mac Lorin**, organizer of the WSF in Montreal. Started the initiative Viral Open Space. There will be another Viral Open Space within a month. They will appreciate assistance in organizing that.

**Presentation Mariam from Iraqi Social Forum (Baghdad)**

Regarding the situation in Iraq:

1) The COVID situation: Over 500 cases and 41 casualties. The ministry of health is following the WHO guidelines. But they are not following all the guidelines. Not following the development of the cases. They don't have enough personnel, equipment or training to handle this situation. The weak health system was one of the main reasons for the demonstrations.

2) Financial situation is worsening. Many families are suffering because day workers now don't have a job to go to.. No plan from the government on how to tackle this.

3) Protests are still ongoing. The demonstrators are gathering in smaller groups so as not to spread the disease. They want to start up demonstrations again at full capacity after the disease stops spreading.

**Presentation from Sally – Latin American Information Agency (Ecuador)**

Total lock down on activities for the next two weeks. Second highest number of deaths in Latin America. Already an economic crisis in Ecuador. They spend their money paying off debt, rather than social measures. Continuous pressure from USA. Still pressure on Venezuela. Cuba has sent medical teams and stands as an example of a country that has handled the situation well. Many countries prevent free media.

Even right wing parties are asking for progressive policies in this situation. Debt alleviations. Recognizing the importance of public health systems and multinational alliances in negotiating prices with medical companies.

**Presentation from Rey, Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (Hong Kong)**

The situation for migrants in Hong Kong. In most of the stimulus packages refugees are not mentioned. Migrant workers are in limbo, because they don't have access to health care systems and have been forced to leave when certain borders closed. The global compact on migration is up to regional review. Crackdowns on migrant workers in several countries. APMM is making a website to map movements of migrants. Include migrants in stimulus packages.

**Presentation from Maren at Stop the Wall (Palestine)**

Israel is continuing its occupation policies under the guise of COVID 19. Gaza has no

	<p>chance of battling the illness because of the Israeli blockade. Fear that we are going into a fascist vision where we allow the vulnerable to die. Those that support violent oppression will rally to battle Corona with the use of military means. We need to make sure money that should go to health care services go there and not to military means.</p> <p>Access to digital tools is a prerequisite for this digital mobilization of social movements. We are able to communicate, but are we able to apply pressure?</p> <p><b>Note from Pierre from WSF / Caritas (France)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Link to shared “PAD” for the event: <a href="https://bimestriel.framapad.org/p/DiscussionVOP&amp;FSM2021">https://bimestriel.framapad.org/p/DiscussionVOP&amp;FSM2021</a></li> </ul>
<b>14.40</b>	<b>Break out rooms (6 - 8 participants each)</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Presentations of participants: 5 minutes to introduce yourselves. Name, country, organization, affiliation with the World Social Forum if relevant.</li> <li>2. Discussion questions: Feel free to share how the corona situation is where you are, how this affects your work and initial thoughts on the corona situation and beyond.</li> </ol>
	<p><b>Group 1:</b> Rey (Hong Kong), Mariam (Iraq), Akshat (India), Leo (Austria/Mexico), Maren (Palestine), Oda (Norway)</p> <p>Update from Oda (Norway)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Big stimulus packages.</li> <li>- Lockdown of schools from kindergartens up to universities from march 12th</li> <li>- Not science based in closing down kindergartens and schools, a lot of poor families struggle with this. Will hit the most vulnerable kids and families.</li> <li>- Migrant workers asked to leave</li> </ul> <p>Update from Akshat, India</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with gender equality in schools</li> <li>- Biggest and longest ever lock down, three weeks</li> <li>- Lower and lower-middle class, and minorities are hit the hardest</li> <li>- Increase in gender-based violence.</li> <li>- A lot of confusion and chaos</li> <li>- Essential government institutions not working properly</li> <li>- Not testing enough</li> </ul> <p>Leo WSF, Austria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Underground activities, medical aspect</li> <li>- General criticism of the economic policies is growing very fast, conservative governments are taking advantage and ordering a complete shut down.</li> <li>- Can only go to the food store</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Near complete breakdown of the economy</li> <li>- 300 000 unemployed, nearly doubled</li> <li>- Migrants expelled all over the world, not included in stimulus packages</li> <li>- Lower class hit the hardest</li> </ul> <p>Rey on migrants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- With regards to migrants: managing migration, but not securing their human rights</li> <li>- Another world is possible, but we need to come up with another solidarity based and human focused system.</li> </ul> <p>Maren</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Something to learn from 2008, when we saw the movements become fragmented</li> <li>- Stop the wall have banked on the street. Will continue to use street-activism, but we also, as a movement, need to use the internet better. Learn from Hong Kong?</li> </ul> <p>Akshat (in chat):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The population that will get affected the most is the migrants, homeless, daily wage labour.</li> <li>• Also, possibilities of gender inequality increasing since women will have to take the extra load of unpaid care work.</li> <li>• We will also see huge mental health repercussions of this.</li> <li>• Social sector may get pushed further. Current government has already made it difficult for a lot of organizations to survive through their regressive policies.</li> <li>• High time Social movements come together. Already we are seeing social sector responding to this crisis and doing everything possible locally.</li> <li>• I hope our Public healthcare system gets reformed and doesn't get co-opted by private sector which will make it expensive for those in lower strata to access.</li> </ul> <p>The crises also reveals movements key role as facilitator of fact-based information, especially to vulnerable and marginalized groups that will be hit the hardest</p>
	<p><b>Group 2:</b> Heikki from the Finnish Social Forum, Eilert from Karibu Foundation, Norway, Angela from Jahalin, Jerusalem, Aruna from Sri Lanka Joram from APMM Hong Kong, Oda from the Norwegian Social Forum</p> <p>Should we understand the Corona crisis as a profound systematic failure of a neoliberal system?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Restriction of space.</li> <li>● Increasing control of the media.</li> </ul>

- More and more things are coming together and limiting the space for civil society.
- More power to the military.
- Sri Lanka: We have time until September, after that they will not dissolve the government. Without civil society the military will take total control. Dangerous situation.
- Jerusalem: The environment is not in focus. Not using this moment of general unity. Worsening in Gaza. Can we go away to change the system in the world in order to change from neoliberalism?
- Pacific: Climate change. Melting of glaciers. Probably due to the plunder and destruction of the environment that's the cause of this pandemic. Rooted in the neoliberal system. The good thing: Corona is exposing the massive inequality. The injustice. Gives us an opportunity as social movements. The people at the grassroot will be mobilized to address the government.

Can we understand this as a moment stressing that “another world” is urgent and not merely possible?

- Yes. A lot of momentum.
- Whether we find the root causes in the neoliberal system or Chinese non regulation is one thing, but how it is exposing the global inequality is a crucial point. Haven't seen the collapse yet. The challenge we have now is to see, not only as a technicality (internet platforms etc), what tools can we use to promote and push for political change?
- The main place we can push is the ICC. Germany + many other will support the ICC regarding Palestine. The only break we have at the moment.
- The environmental lobby is one of the best steps we have.
- Necessary to feed our messages to the average israeli.

As countries close down and economies crashes, could this also mean new opportunities for social movements? Are there different analysis of the situation in the Global South and the Global North?

- Time to start thinking of drastic change to save the planet.
- Global financial crisis that's going to hit us hard.
- Public sector is slow to respond (Finland). Pathetic when it is one of the richest countries in the world.
- Great amount of layoffs. Crisis of financial capital. Who is going to pay for this crisis?
- Huge packages to save the businesses, but not the people.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Rules of social media are not good for creating an actual movement, not a fake network. Should create by the technical means a proper network.</li> <li>● Drastic change is coming anyway.</li> <li>● A revolution is coming? People are starting to define their limits, perhaps out of their needs.</li> </ul>
15.14	<p><b>Group 3:</b> Ole, Norway, NSF; Sally, Ecuador, ALAI; Kangwa Mabuliki, Zambia, AATEEA; Sandra Navarro, Spain, FSMTE; Averill, France, Commonspolis.org</p> <p>Kangwa: Zambia Grave situation, most so for the unprivileged people. Many people without possibility to follow advice as they lack access to clean water and soap.</p> <p>Key question now is if the government can help people to survive, and provide basic necessities as clean water, food. This is already happening in Rwanda and South Africa the same. Only a short time ago it was only 2 cases now 42. Challenge it is not possible to do a total lock down of society,</p> <p>Averill: Commonspolis work in Spain &amp; France. They are helping with experiences reinforcing methods of direct democratic. In France people are getting organized through existing online platform including for citizen votes like Decidim. Helping small and bigger actions =&gt; we need to learn from open source movements to share practices and tips regarding online tools and how to use free and data protected tools online.</p> <p>Sally: This crisis shows flaws of neoliberal system. The crisis moves forward to a changed society, to better or worse. There is a strong sense of urgency.</p> <p>The financial system has been on the brink of crisis for several years. How we manage will make a huge difference. We need to make collective proposals.</p> <p>Tech, can help us to organize online. But can we put pressure online? Need to be focused on key issues. Urgent situations for migrants and other groups. There should be a coordinated demand for global debt cancellation. Need for pressure on pharmaceutical companies. International solidarity. We need to find trustworthy sources for alternative information. Governments are covering up real numbers, while alternative media experience that their twitter accounts and such are being closed.</p> <p>Risks with technology. Corporate models. Dependent on global corporations. Need alternatives. Internet Social Forum proposal, need to intensify.</p> <p>Ole: This brings forward new issues on copyright and open source. The medical solutions and global research needs to be accessible for all, and make sure that no</p>

	<p>one is locked out from access to solution due to copyright costs. Also highlights the need for open source democratic communication channels that can't be censored or closed down by corporations without any transparency.</p> <p>Facebook can easily be censored, collect good practices,</p> <p>Sandra: Barcelona, WSF-TE is cancelled, infrastructure and technical team can't continue. They need to find another way to collaborate, to continue the work and efforts from the organizations and confluences</p>
	<p><b>Group 4:</b> Anne Sofie from Norway, Chris from Canada, Salman from ISF, Pierre from France, Undine from South Africa, Dileepa from Sri Lanka, Jason from Italy, Johanna fra NSF/ISF.</p> <p>Some reflections:</p> <p>Protest movement is continuing. Only 30 cases of corona in South Africa before lockdown. In poor areas people ignored the lockdown until they were sent home by the army.</p> <p>The situation is affecting vulnerable people the most. But at the same time shows the importance of the people working low paid jobs, like nurses, renovation workers, cleaning personell.</p> <p>This is indeed a moment of possibilities. Personal response is to put aside our fears.</p> <p>Inspiring to see how people are coming together in creative ways.</p> <p>The technological advances are amazing. We should try to use this window of opportunity. It unites different communities.</p> <p>Two scenarios: 1) noe-liberalist parties taking over after this situation, or 2) new conscience and movement.</p> <p>I believe it has shown us a new way of living. Accelerated development.</p> <p>! Blame the system!</p> <p>Fascinating to see how the situation is affecting different countries in similar ways. Financial crises. Many people are loosing their jobs, but it is a moment of possibilities.</p> <p>Not mainly a financial crisis, but a crisis that displays the profound failures of the system.</p>

	<p>We will follow up this meeting in the next Virtual Open forum.</p>
<p>15:20</p>	<p><b>Summary in plenary</b></p> <p>Groups provided their reports. In the midst of the crisis there was also a sense of hope and the groups shared motivation to use this historic moment to strengthen common initiatives and global networking and mobilization.</p> <p>Many people articulated a desire for a new conversation soon.</p> <p>The information will be synthesized for potential points of convergence, and meeting minutes will be sent as soon as possible.</p> <p>The Norwegian Social Forum potentially hopes to invite to a new conversation during the next Viral Open Space, suggested for May 2020? We will keep you updated as soon as we have any dates. If anyone would like to contribute in organizing this, suggestions for topics to be discussed or other inputs, feel free to get in touch.</p>