

Minutes of UK European Social Forum (ESF) NGO Meeting
House of Commons - 10th May 2004

Attendance:

Dave Timms (World Development Movement), Hannah Griffiths (Friends of the Earth), David Hillman, Lily Grimes (Tobin Tax Network), Steve Tibbett, Tom Marchbanks (War on Want), Alison Cairns (Oxfam), Atieno Ndomo (Bretton Woods Project), Kim Trathen (Jubilee Debt Campaign), Sam Goddard (Action Aid), Hannah Morley (Peru Support Group), Jenny Ricks (Trade Justice Movement), Martin Gordon (Christian Aid), Jennifer Hadley (CAFOD), Patricia Gilbert (Development Education Association), Miles Litvinoff (One World.net/One World UK), Sachin Gupta (International HIV/AIDS Alliance), Huw Edwards, Jenny Wizzard (Greater London Authority), Michael Willis (Action Village India), Tom Fyans (Amnesty International UK), Jayne Millar (Freshwater Action Network), Lucy Tweedie (Health Unlimited), Leigh McAlea (One World Action), Ann Feltham (Campaign Against Arms Trade), Gordon Hutchison (Latin America Bureau), Kirsty McNeill (Stop AIDS Campaign), Raphael Volovitch (CRID, France), Howard Mollett (BOND). Apologies Fey Rodway (PLAN International), Pat Priestley (Responding to Conflict), Lucy Pearce (People & Planet), Kelly Haynes (Tourism Concern).

Dave Timms opened the meeting and it was agreed that he should facilitate. Lily Grimes took minutes. An agenda was agreed for the meeting:

AGENDA

- 1) European Social Forum introduction: organising the event and planning content of the programme
- 2) Questions and Discussion
- 3) Proposals & Actions.

1. ESF introduction presented by David Hillman and Hannah Griffiths. The World Social Forum started in January 2000 in Porto Alegre in Brazil as a counter-conference to the business leader's meeting (the World Economic Forum) held in Davos in Switzerland. The Forum created a political space for the articulation and expression of ideas for the creation of a better world under the heading: "Another World is Possible". The success of the Forum led to a call for 'Social Forums' to be held regionally and within 3 years they had been held in every continent. The first European Social Forum took place in Florence in 2002, followed by Paris in 2003 and now London will be hosting the 3rd ESF from 14 - 17 October 2004 (website: www.fse-esf.org <<http://www.fse-esf.org/>>). About 50-60,000 people attended Florence and Paris and similar numbers may be expected to attend in London. The event will cost in the region of £1 million to put on. It will be paid for by registration fees from those attending and by major donations from the GLA and large Trade Unions. Alexandra Palace in North London is planned as the main venue for the event with satellite venues in Bloomsbury. The event is being organised by the UK Organising Committee.

Please see attached: UK Organising Committee statement. Organisations can affiliate to the committee by paying an affiliation fee and agreeing to the Charter of Principles of the World Social Forum. Please see attached: World Social Forum Charter of Principles. The Organising Committee meets monthly. There is a Coordinating Committee that meets weekly. The majority of the work needed to deliver the event is carried out by working groups of which the Programme Group is of singular importance as it concentrates on the content of this year's ESF.

There are three types of meeting at the Social Forum:

Plenaries, which are organised by the ESF European Assembly, that have traditionally been large meetings dominated by presentations and not very interactive; Seminars, which combine presentation and audience interaction in equal part; and Workshops that are smaller specialist sessions where European coordination can be decided. These are often 100% interactive. Organisations may now submit applications for seminars and workshops.

Please see attached: Guidelines for proposing seminars and workshops - ESF 2004.

Please note the deadline for these applications is 25 July. It is inevitable that more seminars will be applied for than can be accommodated in the programme. Some seminars will thus be merged. To reduce the likelihood of this happening it is highly recommended to co-organise seminars with European counterpart organisations. In respect of content, agreement has so far been reached on the following 5 over-arching themes although there is no agreement concerning the exact final wording:

- i) war and peace
- ii) citizenship and democracy
- iii) opposition to neo-liberalism and issues around the economy, labour and work
- iv) environmental crisis and sustainability
- v) racism, discrimination, identities and the far right.

Final decisions on the themes and content are made at the European level and two critical forthcoming meetings are the European Programme Group meeting in Paris on 29 May (where countries may send a certain number of delegates) and the next European Assembly meeting to be held in Berlin from 18 - 20 June. European Assemblies are the ultimate decision-making body. Decisions are made on the basis of consensus.

Much discussion has taken place this year and agreement reached on reducing the number of plenaries (from the 55 in Paris in 2003) to approximately half that number shifting emphasis instead towards seminars, which are more participative. There is an intention that some seminars this year may be bigger than some plenaries in order to break the mould that the plenary is in some way a superior meeting. There are moves to alter the length of sessions from three hours to two hours and secure a 50/50 gender balance among speakers, as well as good representation from Eastern European countries. There is, however, considerable concern that because global poverty is not specifically identified as one of the over-arching themes this will seriously impact on the programme space available to address matters of development and Europe's responsibility for global inequality. This in turn may adversely affect space for Southern voices to be heard at this year's ESF.

2. Questions and Discussion

There was an extensive question and answer session addressing the organisation of, and participation in, the ESF.

Organisation of the ESF:

Q. Can an organisation that affiliates to the Organising Committee in any way be held financially liable should this year's ESF incur financial losses?

It was reported that a company limited by guarantee was in the process of being set up. The company would act as a legal entity to receive funds from major donors for the express purpose of paying for the ESF event. The Memorandum and Articles of Association (the Mem & Arts) of this company are presently being drawn up. A letter from a lawyer offered at the end of last week on the question of possible liability of

affiliated organisations indicated that in principle provided an affiliated organisation was not a member or director of the company that there was no consequent liability. It was heavily emphasised that participation in the event did not require affiliation and that no organisation should be concerned on that account. Affiliation is a way of financially supporting the ESF, endorsing it and potentially having a greater voice in proceedings. However, certain important concerns remained. These were, chiefly, that before affiliating many organisations would first like to see the Mem & Arts of the Company and secondly know that the company's accounts are transparent and accessible to scrutiny. Many organisations expressed a serious desire to affiliate if these stumbling blocks could be overcome.

Q. What is the involvement of the Greater London Authority (GLA) with this year's ESF? What threat to the event exists if the present mayor, Ken Livingstone, is not re-elected?

The GLA is a partner organisation that is supportive of London hosting the ESF and is keen to facilitate the process with practical contributions such as the use of rooms in the GLA building. As funding partners to the delivery of the ESF indications are that once funding is committed it will be honoured. It was acknowledged that support from the GLA is of immense value to realising the ESF on many fronts but that the entire event cannot stand or fall on the basis of the support or otherwise of one actor.

Q. Will Alexandra Palace and the sites in Bloomsbury be enough to accommodate the event? Is Haringey council involved? Are there transport issues?

It is believed that all the plenaries and many of the seminars can be accommodated at Alexandra Palace both within the building itself and using marquees on the extensive tarmac areas around the main structure. A Venue Working Group has scoped out and booked what they can of the available university space in Bloomsbury to house remaining seminars and the workshops. Haringey Council are aware that the ESF is planned to take place in the borough later in the year. The issue of transport to and from Alexandra Palace has been looked at and the running of specific ESF buses is one of a number of options to be considered.

Q. What is the position about groups who would like to participate but have a problem affording it?

Any group who would like to affiliate but cannot afford the affiliation fee can write to the coordination committee to explain their circumstances and the amount they can afford. The position of the Organising Committee is that no group should be excluded from participation from affiliating on the grounds of their finances. The Coordinating Committee can be contacted on ukesfcommittee@gn.apc.org <<mailto:ukesfcommittee@gn.apc.org>>. In respect of assistance to groups from outside the UK to support their participation in the ESF it has been agreed that a solidarity fund will be set up to help with participation from Eastern European countries.

Participation in the ESF:

Q. How many plenaries will there be and how do the organisers decide on which ones take place?

A defining characteristic of a plenary is that it is organised by the ESF European Assembly as opposed to seminars and workshops that are organised by the participating groups themselves. There were 55 plenaries in Paris and it was agreed

at the last European Assembly in Istanbul that this was too many. This year there will be a maximum of 25, maybe less. Seminars can be used to fulfil the function of plenaries; they can be just as big and important. How plenaries are to be agreed upon is still to be decided. All groups, including NGOs, can send in proposals to their Programme Working Group to be raised at a European level.

Q. Who decides on speakers at plenaries and seminars?

One proposal is for the titles of the plenaries to be decided and then each plenary will have a commission of a small number of organisations who decide on speakers. This has not been finalised. However, there is nothing to stop an organisation bringing speakers from anywhere, including the South, to speak in seminars they are proposing.

Q: Will there be negotiations to agree seminar titles and content of seminars? When do we find out our seminars have been approved?

Title and content should be proposed by organisations submitting the seminar. 25th July is the closing date for proposals.

Q. How have the over-arching themes been decided so far? Can the themes be changed?

The last European Assembly meeting held in Istanbul in April decided the 5 over-arching themes. Decisions as to any changes will be made at a European Programme Group meeting to be held in Paris on May 29. It was suggested that UK NGOs should push for a 6th theme to be included around Southern poverty issues. The proposal could be broadened into a call by NGOs across Europe.

Q. What advantages are there to promoting global poverty as the 6th theme?

If we don't get the 6th theme we will be allocated less time and space to discuss development issues. As 2005 will be a big year for promoting the development agenda in the UK, with the G8 here in June followed by presidency of the EU, we would be remiss if we were not to maximise the opportunity the ESF presents us for debate, activities and planning 2005.

Q: Is there any focus on education or the involvement of young people at the ESF?

There are some calls for separate spaces for education and young people. This has not been decided yet.

Q: How do activities or outcomes from the ESF feed into the World Social Forum (WSF)?

The ESF is one of many regional organisations bound by the WSF principles (see attachment). However, the ESF does not feed policies into to the WSF.

3. Proposals & Actions

1st Proposal: that a NGO representative attend the European Programme meeting in Paris on 29 May.

Action: All agreed that it was important that the NGO sector was represented on the UK delegation and that the NGOs present were happy that one of Dave Timms, Hannah Griffiths and David Hillman attend the Paris meeting, and that they should

decide who that person would be amongst themselves. Their mandate from this meeting was to argue the case for a sixth theme on global poverty. It was later decided that Dave Timms should be nominated as the UK NGO representative.

2nd Proposal: that we start a forum/network for UK NGOs to encourage and facilitate the involvement of NGOs in ESF 2004.

Action: All agreed that we should continue as an informal network and agree a date for a follow-up meeting at the end of this meeting.

3rd Proposal: To draft a call for a 6th theme on poverty and the global South to which NGOs could sign up and which would be sent to the UK Programme Group and the European Programme Group and which could be circulated to European partners and networks for further signatures.

Action: This was agreed

Some organisations expressed interest in affiliating to the ESF Organising Committee but reservations were articulated around legal and financial liability 4th

Proposal: To draft a statement to be signed by NGOs who expressed an interest in affiliating but could not due to the lack of legal and financial information.

Action: This was agreed

The following proposals were not agreed but the meeting asked that they be noted:

a) Proposal re 7th theme: Could refugee issues make up a 7th theme?

It was not agreed to seek a 7th theme rather that migration and asylum should be included more explicitly within the wording of existing themes.

b) Proposal re wording in theme 3: Could we lose the word "opposition" to neo-liberalism in theme three as other themes just have, for instance, the word 'racism' not 'opposition to racism'? In discussion many agreed that the wording of the themes needs to be improved. It was noted, however, that the exact wording of the existing themes is yet to be finalised.

c) Proposal: expansion of current themes as opposed to creating a new 'sixth' theme. Could theme three "global economy" be expanded to bring in 'development issues' or could we expand theme four to include 'development'? In discussion it was felt that these were second best options after having a sixth theme specifically on global poverty. To expand theme three, for instance, might pit trade unions against NGOs in bidding for programme space at the event.

The next UK ESF NGO meeting will be held on Monday 7 June at 11.00 (-1.00pm) at the office of Jubilee Debt Campaign, the Grayston Centre, 28 Charles Square, London N1 (nearest tube: Old Street).