



WORLD WITHOUT EMPIRE :

A People's Congress and Peace Festival on Spirit, Movements & the End of U.S. Domination (23-24 April 2010)

World Without Empire: A People's Congress and Peace Festival on Spirit, Movements and the End of U.S. Domination is an interfaith (primarily Christian-Muslim), intergenerational, feminist gathering of grassroots groups and intellectuals from the U.S. and Global South. It will be convened on 23-24 April 2010 in New York City to promote a North-South engagement in counter-imperial struggle and the elaboration of domination-free spirituality. This conference is sponsored by Peace for Life (PfL), an international movement committed to inter-religious, South-South and North-South solidarity against empire. This event is another step in PfL's responses to the current geopolitical reality of empire, with its expansionist militarization, neoliberal economics, hegemonic control of the world's resources, and untrammled ecological destruction.

Background

Peace for Life traces its roots to the highly charged ecumenical conference convened in Manila in September 2002, a year after the Bush Administration initiated the US War on Terror and the Philippines was singled out as the "second front of the war on terror" after Afghanistan. Co-sponsored by the World Council of Churches, Christian Conference of Asia and National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the International Ecumenical Conference on *Terrorism in a Globalized World* was an international gathering of 135 church leaders and activists from 28 countries, who spoke of the combined effects of this new U.S. aggression and called for the creation of a new ecumenical alliance that will build faith-based resistance to the terror of war and economic globalization.

A year after the Manila conference, Peace for Life was launched in Korea and nearly two years later in December 2004, it was formally inaugurated at the First People's Forum *Sowing Seeds of Peace in the Era of Empire: Christians in Solidarity with Muslims*. Held in the southern Philippine island of Mindanao, a conflict-ridden region with significant Muslim population, it broadened a predominantly Protestant network to draw in progressive Muslim allies. Since that time, Peace for Life has organized solidarity missions, roundtables, peace festivals in Hong Kong, Kathmandu, Mumbai, Karachi, Nairobi, the West Bank and Amman. It convened in March 2009 in Bogota the Second People's Forum on the theme, *Without Fear of Empire: Global People's Resistance*. Representatives of struggles in these countries will especially join the New York event in order to pose their challenges to the center of empire.

Peace for Life is a South-based solidarity network identifying modern empire building as the single most formidable force impeding the realization of fundamental values of justice, equality, human rights and integrity of creation. It harnesses faith, spirituality and solidarity for transformative action.

A World without Empire

Since that time, Christian ecumenical bodies have also foregrounded the problem of empire and the need to dream, think and act beyond it. Among those that have produced key documents and declarations on the problematic of empire are the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2004, 2006, 2009), United Church of Canada (2007, 2009), Lutheran World Federation (2007), and World Student Christian Federation (2006). The concern about imperial dominion is also evident, however, in works within other religious traditions (e.g. Islam, Judaism, Buddhism,

indigenous). Many other social movements have likewise emphasized the need to analyze critically and resist forthrightly the U.S.-based Empire of today. This People's Congress and Peace Festival offers a way to focus on this world concern about U.S. global hegemony among various religious groups as well as a host of other social movements.

While Peace for Life has met throughout the South, it has not yet convened at the center of empire nor adequately drawn upon the perspectives of those who *are the South* in the North – racial/ethnic and immigrant communities as well as the poor and unemployed. Significantly, the *World without Empire* events will be held in New York, the symbolic capital of the Empire and a city teeming with social contradictions.

Neither has it highlighted the analysis of women and youth as those significantly affected by empire dynamics. Women and youth representation is particularly problematic in patriarchal religious communities whose religious leaders are most often men, and whose youth remain poorly represented in the leadership. While advocating justice in one sphere, oppressive systems are replicated vis-à-vis the religious communities male leaders represent. In order to imagine a world without empire, all forms of empire consciousness and relations of dominance must be surmounted.

This conference is inspired by critical analysis and dominance-free spirituality that imagines a future not yet possible. Nearly ten years after Sept 11th, it is the imperative of inter-religious alliances, churches, the academe, racial minorities, women, youth, immigrants, labor, sexual minorities and all global justice movements to imagine a future that is not a reproduction of old ideologies and power relations. Global North-based youth, women of color, new immigrants, faith-based communities and social movements in conversation with their partners in the Global South can engender a social imagination, develop and sharpen strategies against the U.S. Empire that itself must face new constraints in an era of financial crisis.

Several Strands Illuminate this Conference

A. Alternative pedagogies – creative expression

Marginalizing the voice of privilege, the People's Congress and Peace Festival will be shaped by three moments: a day of dialogue between movements of the North and South; a public fishbowl forum; and a Peace Festival. In an effort to form a non-hierarchical dialogue, the conversation in both the small group and in the public event will be held in the form of a double fishbowl with a moderator and one or more empty chairs open for participation by others in the larger gathered circle.

Envisioned as a symbolic journey out of empire, the Peace Festival will feature youth involved in staged political resistance and in the naming of oppression through the arts – dance, music, theatre, video, painting, drumming, spoken word poetry, etc. Artists will present their work, actively engage participants in the challenge to the cultural infrastructure supporting empire and express cultural forms of emancipation that promote a culture of peace and justice. Artistic expression will be the catalyst of the Peace Festival's mission of comprehending empire and envisioning a new way of living without global hegemony.

B. The U.S/world linkage

A key idea is to link resistance to empire that is *global* with the more national and local struggles and perspectives against forms of imperial domination *within* the U.S. We need to cultivate this connection, forging new alliances for an inter-religious and a wider public's counter-imperial resistance. A focus on marginal communities stresses the need for Peace for Life to move past a network representing older male dominated leadership and presses us to think carefully about alternative frameworks for analysis that are more creative, life-giving and express the trials and hopes of our current shared lives.

Again, this is to build on convergences already in motion for creating worldwide and just peace. The inclusion of inter-religious voices and their concerns in this alliance of world movements is especially important now because religion is increasingly being used to buttress and legitimize the US imperial drive.

C. Grassroots initiatives and South-South movements

The conference will be geared to *movements*, rather than only to the institutional character of counter-imperial faith-based action. It will be concerned with movements that are global even though this gathering focuses on connecting to U.S. grassroots initiatives. In the tradition of Peace for Life, this world focus will continue to be a South-led and South-driven movement with a focus on women and youth and will emphasize South-South solidarity for world peace and justice-making.

D. A Muslim-Christian focus

While the event will highlight the inter-religious dimension of today's struggle amid empire (e.g. Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, indigenous), *World Without Empire* will give particular emphasis to Muslim-Christian exchange while focusing on women and youth in both communities. We recognize the special ways that the Muslim world is under the hegemony of the U.S. today, particularly after September 11, when the Muslim community was targeted and ostracized. The conference thus seeks to facilitate solidarity and partnerships with Muslim struggles in the U.S. and elsewhere.

E. The theologian/activist cooperation

The congress will also bring together activists and theologians from the South to share the emerging inter-religious resistance to Empire with those theologians and activists from within the United States, in order to consolidate the critique of Empire from religious traditions worldwide and contribute to a spirituality of liberation based on transnational alliances.

F. Other issues for dialogue

Among the key issues to be highlighted are the foreign policy shifts from Bush to Obama, the impact of the global financial crisis and the food crisis. Also the whole issue of complicity with empire, i.e. how empire has benefited even those, specially in the North, who are engaged in social activism and how it has transformed movements into NGOs and even businesses.

Objectives

A. FOR BUILDING COALITIONS

***To broaden Peace for Life's concrete linkage to other movements:**

- (1) between various faith-based movements themselves, highlighting Muslim-Christian solidarity
- (2) between inter-religious movements and other social movements, with a focus on women and youth
- (3) between grassroots groups within the United States and those movements outside of the United States.
- (4) between movement representatives from countries of former Peace for Life events with respective solidarity movements and groups in the US.

B. FOR CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

***To contribute to the new linkage of critical themes.** Counter-imperial movements have privileged an analysis based on class, economics and nation. *World without Empire* builds on these and foregrounds race, gender, and spirituality in counter-imperial resistance to the politics of U.S. Empire.

C. FOR CREATIVE RESISTANCE

***To invite and engage intergenerational activists from the creative and popular arts** who are already involved in counter-imperial liberating struggle,

- (1) to provide a platform for emancipatory, artistic expression and action;
- (2) to render visible and celebrate the work of the People's Congress and Peace Festival while in New

- York City;
(3) to open up alternative visions of a world without empire.

Dates, Venue, and Participants

The People's Congress and Peace Festival will take place on 23-24 April 2010 at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, with participants arriving and departing on 22 and 25 April, respectively. The participants shall include U.S. grassroots activists, specially women and youth, from popular emancipatory movements, inter-religious movements, as well as from institutions and academic communities. Several representative international delegates from faith communities and social movements mainly in the South will be invited.

Local Hosting, Co-sponsorship, Planning and Coordination

The Union Theological Seminary (UTS) will be hosting the events on their campus, i.e. arranging the venue and rooms for selected guests, offering hospitality for the welcome reception, and providing logistical support as well as visa facilitation. Co-sponsoring the People's Congress and Peace Festival is the United Methodist Church General Board of Global Ministries (UMC-GBGM) which has been requested to provide accommodation for participants from outside the U.S. at the Alma Mathews House. Also co-sponsors are the Drew University and the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF)-North America Coordination. Other groups and institutions like the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC)-related churches and programs, New York Theological Seminary, San Francisco Theological Seminary, National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, Council of Islamic Organizations, and United for Peace and Justice will be approached for human, material and intellectual support.

A Planning and Host Committee has been formed, with Rev. Christopher Ferguson (WCC representative to the UN office in NY) as moderator, and Prof. Hyun Kyung Chung (Professor, UTS) as convenor. The committee is tasked to develop the program, including inviting speakers and participants, conduct fundraising, and assist with support for international guest accommodations. Other members of the committee are: David Wildman (Executive Secretary for Human Rights and Racial Justice of the UMC-GBGM), Dr. Kathryn Poethig (Associate Professor for Global Studies, California State University), Gabriel Habib (Director of Religious and Cultural Relations, Middle East Fellowship), Dr. Namsoon Kang (Associate Professor, Brite Divinity School, Texas Christian University), Dr. Mark Taylor (Professor, Princeton Theological Seminary), Victor Hsu (National Director, DPRK Program at World Vision International), Dr. Elizabeth Tapia (Director, Center for Christianities in Global Context, Drew University), Luciano Kovacs (Coordinator, WSCF North America), Dr. Lester Edwin Ruiz (Association for Theological Schools in the US and Canada), Rev. Liberato Bautista (Assistant General Secretary and Representative to the UN, UMC-General Board of Church and Society), Trish Kanous (Coalition for Palestinian Rights), Dr. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (formerly of Drew University), Dr. Pamela Brubaker (Professor of Religion and Ethics, California Lutheran University), and Carmencita Karagdag (Coordinator, Peace for Life).

An international Advisory Committee has likewise been created, composed of Rev. Eunice Santana (Moderator, Peace for Life, and Director, Instituto Caribeno de Accion y Formacion Ecumenica), Dr. Kim Yong Bock (Co-Moderator, Peace for Life and President, Advanced Institute for Integral Study of Life), Rhea Whitehead (United Church of Canada), and Prof. Ulrich Duchrow (Moderator, Kairos-Europa).

Event-planning subcommittees have also been created to facilitate particular areas of conference planning. The subcommittees are:

1. Program Committee: Kathryn Poethig and Pamela Brubaker (co-chairs), Christopher Ferguson, Elizabeth Tapia, Jeremy Kirk, Catherine Bourdeau, Lyda Pierce, and Christine Pae
2. Participation Committee: Mark Lewis Taylor and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (co-chairs), David Wildman, Gabriel Habib, Luciano Kovacs, and Paul Knitter
3. Budget/Fundraising Committee: Victor Hsu (chair), Gabriel Habib, and Liberato Bautista
4. Logistics and Hosting Committee: Chung Hyun Kyung and Kyle Fischer (co-chairs), Catherine Bourdeau, Jung Keyongil, and Ruth Batusta
5. Peace Festival Committee: Luciano Kovacs and Michelle Dumont (co-chairs), Alice Glaze, and Brandon

Cook

A paid student coordinator will take on tasks to support the Planning and Host Committee. The WSCF North American Coordinator will work with a paid student coordinator to take the lead in planning the Peace Festival, along with UTS-Poverty Initiative. Together, they will manage the budget, outreach, publicity, program and logistics for the Peace Festival. Also assisting the Program and Local Host Committee are students from UTS. The Manila-based Peace for Life Secretariat will be responsible for international participation and overall coordination.

10 December 2009