

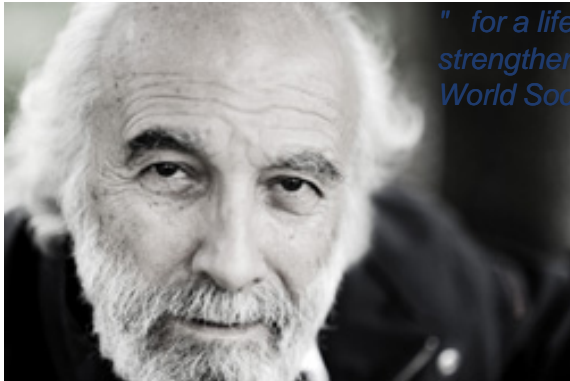


The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Chico Whitaker Ferreira (Brazil)

Honorary Award (2006)



" for a lifetime's dedicated work for social justice that has strengthened democracy in Brazil and helped give birth to the World Social Forum, showing that another world is possible".

Photo: Wolfgang Schmidt

Francisco ('Chico') Whitaker Ferreira is a Roman Catholic activist, who has worked for democracy and against corruption throughout his life, both at home and in exile. He is one of the key people behind the burgeoning World Social Forum.

Early career and exile

Chico Whitaker was born in 1931 and received his diploma in architecture and urban planning in 1957. He left architecture school to participate in research on the standard of living of the inhabitants of São Paulo at the Research Institute SAGMACS. Whitaker joined the Planning Office of the State Government of São Paulo and became, in 1963, the director of planning for the Federal Government's Land Reform Superintendence, SUPRA. He left this function with the military coup in 1964, joining the opposition to the regime. During 1965-66 he could still work in Brazil, as a planning advisor of the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB). But at the end of 1966, the military forced him into exile with his wife Stella and their four children.

During 15 years abroad, Whitaker initially lived in France, where he worked as a teacher in the training of Third World public servants, as researcher and as UNESCO consultant. He also worked in Chile for the UN Economic Commission for Latin America for four years, and lived there during the overthrow of Allende. When returning to France after his stay in Chile, he coordinated during six years the "International Study Days for a Society overcoming Domination" in Paris, launched by the National Conference of Brazilian Bishops, with the support of four other Bishops' Conferences and the International Commission of Jurists. This project facilitated the exchange of experiences among people fighting in 100 countries against all types of oppression.

Work for democracy and against corruption in Brazil

Back in Brazil from 1982, Whitaker first worked as political and social affairs advisor to Cardinal Evaristo Arns in São Paulo. He was one of the founders of the São Paulo Association for Solidarity in Unemployment and, always with his wife, was one of the main activists in organising the popular participation process during the drafting of the Brazilian constitution: The "Plenaries for popular participation", created all over the country for this purpose, presented 122 amendments to the Constitution project, with 12 million citizen's signatures.

From 1989 to 1996, Whitaker was elected twice as local councillor in São Paulo for the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT). In 1996 he left this function to return to work with civil society. He remained a member of the PT until early 2006, resigning when he considered the party was no more faithful to the principles of its foundation.

As Executive Secretary to the CNBB's Commission of Justice and Peace (CBJP) Whitaker both conceived the idea, and was instrumental in the implementation, of a Bill of Popular Initiative: One million signatures were collected against electoral corruption, and particularly the purchase of votes. The Bill was approved by Congress in 1999. Whitaker sits as the CBJP's representative on the National Committee of the Movement Against Electoral Corruption, created after the approval of the Bill, which involves more than twenty of the major national civil society organisations in Brazil. The Bill has already had great impact: Since the first election respecting it in 2000, more than 650 mayors, councillors, deputies, senators and state governors, who were found to have been involved in electoral corruption, have lost their mandates.

Since 2008, Whitaker has participated in the Movement against Electoral Corruption's collection of signatures for a new bill of popular initiative aiming to impede the candidacy of people convicted by the justice system.

The World Social Forum

In 2000 Whitaker was one of those who conceived the idea of the World Social Forum (WSF) and played a key role in bringing it to realisation. The idea was to hold a large conference event, a parallel to the World Economic Forum in Davos, to share the various insights of those from around the world who were working for alternatives to world domination by capital, within the parameters of neoliberalism. The slogan was *Another World is Possible*. The idea was taken forward by eight leading Brazilian organisations, operating by consensus. Today, Whitaker is a member of the WSF International Council, representing it in the Brazilian Commission on Justice and Peace.

The first World Social Forum was held in 2001 in the city of Porto Alegre in Brazil, attracting 4,000 delegates and 16,000 individual participants from many countries far more than the organizers had anticipated. People came from Porto Alegre and other places in Brazil and neighbouring countries, as well as from Europe, North America, Asia and Africa. It was such a success that a second event was held in 2002, attended by 15,000 delegates representing 4,909 organisations and movements in 131 countries, with another 35,000 'non-delegate' participants. During 2002, several regional or national forums were organised in all continents, and a World Social Forum took place again in Porto Alegre in 2003, with 100,000 participants. That year also saw the first Asian Social Forum being organised in Hyderabad. Between 2004 and 2009, the WSF took place in various parts of the world, like Mumbai, Nairobi, Caracas, Karachi and Porto Alegre, with up to 150,000 attendants. In 2008, the WSF held a global day of action, with self organised activities all over the world.

From the beginning, the Forums have been much more than just meeting places. They have become platforms for civil society organisations from all around the world to exchange views, form coalitions, work on concrete strategies and coordinate campaigns.

Whitaker explained the success through the principles adopted to organise the Forums: horizontality, non-directivity, respect of diversity, no spokespersons, no final document or

orientations, self-organisation of the participants activities in the Forums. The principles were defined in 2001, after the success of the first Forum, in a Charter of Principles, which is now the sole criterion for participating in the Forum events. It allows anyone to take part, except government representatives, military organisations and political parties.

Whitaker wrote for a French publication for the 2003 World Social Forum: "Porto Alegre is not a 'summit of grassroots organizations' nor is it a world congress of a new international movement, but rather a free-form context designed for encounters to enable mutual recognition and learning, which respects all individualities. The Forum brings together delegates from social organisations that are striving the world over to build a world centred on people instead of on accumulating wealth. Today the Forum's organisers are certain they are on the right track to helping citizens rid themselves of their feeling of powerlessness".

Liberation Theology, the inspiration underlying Whitaker's life's work, is the radical Catholic theology, which as he puts it says that "true religion, especially Christianity, basically means working for the upliftment of the poor, fighting for their rights and against the exploitation of the have-nots by the haves."

Honors and Publications

In 2003, Whitaker received the "Medaille Vermeil" of the Paris Municipality. In 2007 he became a councillor of the World Future Council, and was nominated Commandeur in the Rio Branco Order of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil in 2008. He also was a visiting professor at the University of Ottawa, Canada.

Among Whitaker's publications are *Planning Yes and No* (1976), and *O desafio do Forum Social Mundial* (2005).

Quotation

"There are far more people in the world than we can ever imagine who want to change things. What we need is to multiply the ways and opportunities to get together."

Chico Whitaker Ferreira

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