



Second U.S. Social Forum Opens New Chapter in US Movements for Justice, Equality, and Sustainability

06-28-2010 – DETROIT The United States Social Forum (USSF) closed Saturday with an inspirational national assembly and closing ceremony. Today, the Forum’s National Planning Committee (NPC) declared the forum a great success with attendance of more than 15,000 people from Detroit, from rural and urban areas across the nation, and from countries across the world including South Africa, Palestine, Honduras and Nepal.

The 2010 USSF came at a critical moment. As the world confronts the converging crises of economy, ecology and empire, the need for global social movements has never been greater. The past three years since the first USSF in Atlanta have been extraordinary - the United States was hit with the worst economic recession in 80 years (demonstrating both our urgent needs as well as opportunities), we elected our first black president on a mandate of hope and change from Bush-era repression, the Latin-American Left has been on the rise; and social movements have forged a strong agenda to fight for systems change and climate justice through the Cochabamba Summit in April 2010. These and other crises and opportunities present a historical moment for movements to intervene, to shine, and to provide answers and solutions to the great problems facing our people and our planet.

Taking “From Detroit to Dakar” as its motto (Dakar is the site of the upcoming World Social Forum in 2011), the Social Forum advanced a US-based agenda for transformation, inspiration and leadership from the grassroots, in sharp contrast to the fear and false solutions offered by conservative members of government and corporate elites.

The week-long gathering of 1,062 workshops and 50 assemblies resulted in more than 50 national days of action being planned and more than 100 resolutions on issues ranging from workers rights, displacement and global migration, challenges facing Detroit and other post-industrial cities, media justice, transformative healing, and fossil fuel extraction.

- From the resolution on Displacement, Migration, and Immigration: “The freedom to move across borders that were set up to colonize and exploit people for profit is a basic element of human dignity. We recognize the right and need for Peoples to migrate and connect across the world to experience other cultures and expand our understanding of life.”
- From the Endless War and Militarism resolution: “We call for a diametrical shift of U.S. tax revenues from war and militarization to meet human needs, here and abroad. This requires recalibrating the moral compass of the nation in ways that prioritize sustainability, justice and equity over power, growth and control of resources.”
- From the Ecological Justice resolution: “We call on our U.S. social movements to recognize that we are in a moment of epic transition on Mother Earth and to unite in a frontline community-led movement for Ecological Justice. We must foster communities of resistance and resilience that are reclaiming our right to home—sharing our resources in a reflective, responsive relationship to place.”

Full text of all resolutions can be viewed here: <http://www.pma2010.org/resolutions>

Organizers decided to hold the Forum in Detroit because of its great legacy of activism. Detroiters Reg McGhee of Michigan Jobs With Justice said “the labor movement in Detroit was fed by the coming together of local and international struggles,” and he praised Detroit as “ground zero of a new agenda, for the rights of the people and the planet, not banks and profit.”

In his address at the Forum’s closing ceremony, Bolivian Ambassador Pablo Solon said, “We need to promote and build an environmental code of justice, and we need to build it from the grassroots.” Criticizing the secrecy and exclusionary nature of the Copenhagen Accord on climate change, Solon noted “You can’t have a small group of nations who, because they think they are the most powerful, are going to be able to decide for the rest. That’s very undemocratic.” He praised the Social Forum process as building great “momentum to organize and mobilize” for a more just and sustainable world.

Attendance and Participation

Official attendance is still being calculated, and as of Sunday morning the NPC estimates at least 15,000 official registrants. The NPC will release a more accurate number on Wednesday, though the true number likely far exceeds the official count. Attendees registered at Cobo Hall, but Forum events and workshops were also held at Hart Plaza and Wayne State University, and attendees took part in actions, work projects, and gatherings all over the city.

Participation was also increased by Detroit Expanded, which was organized in recognition of the millions struggling in communities across the world who were unable to arrive in Detroit due to economic hardship, war, or visa requirements. Detroit Expanded connected USSF workshops and People’s Movement Assemblies to people across the nation and globe via chat, VoIP calls, streaming audio and video, and other moments of connection, and helped fuel national and global participation in the Forum by thousands of people who were not physically in Detroit, but still directly connected to and involved with the Forum as a result.

Range of Events and Impact

Cultural events were a critical part of the US Social Forum this year, and many free concerts and art exhibits were held at Hart Plaza and across the city. In the Children’s Social Forum and the Creativity Lab, attendees worked on art, sculptures, and puppets for the actions, demonstrations, and street theater held during the Forum.

“I’ve never seen anything like this, in Detroit or anywhere,” said Forum participant and Detroit resident Charnika Jett. “The sense of joy, support, and determination on the part of the people here, both Detroiters and visitors, is just incredible.” Louis Head, an organizer from New Mexico, was especially excited at the opportunities to work with Detroiters on specific issues like food and climate justice. “I’ve been to lots of conferences where people just talk at you. But here at the Social Forum I’ve gotten a lot of hands-on experience. I was actually able to work on these issues in Detroit and meet the people here, who are awesome.”

“The Social Forum made all kinds of history in terms of the frameworks and actions we committed to during the People’s Movement Assembly,” National Coordinator Adrienne Maree Brown said. “The work of communities to uplift and align our work, and the efforts of the People’s Movement Assembly folks to synthesize that work, was dynamic and incredible.”

The Leftist Lounge party in Detroit’s Eastern market on Friday, June 25 had over 6500 attendees, and lasted until 3:30 am, featuring nationally renowned DJs and performers, and was decorated with art pieces created in the Social Forum’s Creativity Lab.

Revenue to the city and local businesses and hotels during the week of the Social Forum is estimated at well over 1 million dollars. Austin Moyer, manager of the Chrome Bar and Grille at Detroit’s Hilton Garden Inn called it the best week of his life. “Not only did I have a full house every night, but the people were amazing, nice to our staff and we had no problems whatsoever. I’ve never seen anything like it.”