

CHRONOLOGY OF GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY EVENTS

Compiled by Jill Timms

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Introduction

The Chronology of Global Civil Society Events seeks to document a broad range of civic activity around the world, including, for example, demonstrations, rallies, campaigns, petitions, social forums and vigils, as well as landmark legal rulings and other victories or defeats for civil society. These are defined as global civil society events if they have a global significance in terms of theme, participants or resonance. The chronology forms an integral part of our Data Programme and being produced annually, it offers a reference tool actively built up over the past eight years.

Chronologies of the year published elsewhere usually focus on events and personalities from the North/West and depend on media coverage which can be biased against civil society activities, or at least certain types. Our aim in this section is to provide a different type of chronology. We present an insight into the diversity of events taking place around the world, the activities of a vast array of groups and organisations, which can be described as part of global civil society in the broadest understanding of the concept. Importantly, we attempt to record events that have occurred in places often not reported in the mainstream media. We also include events that are often overlooked in statistics on the growth of civil society activities and organisations, because of their unusual nature, the difficulty of representing them quantitatively, or because their existence is rarely formally recorded.

A global network of correspondents has been built up over the last eight years, with correspondents reporting events they have been involved in or are aware of in their area. This edition of the chronology presents qualitative accounts of events that have taken place between 1 May 2007 and 30 April 2008. It is important to make clear that we do not intend this to be a comprehensive account of all global civil society activity. Please note that as in previous years social forums are included when experienced as a particular event, so the organisational form that some forums take mean they are not visible here. Also, a number of social forums now meet on a biennial rather than annual basis, and so their absence from the chronology does not mean they are no longer active. We mainly include social forums at the world, thematic, regional and national level.

We recognise the limitations of using a finite correspondent network and of working with their reports and web-based sources, which might not always be up-to-date or in a language accessible to us. However, through this chronology,

together with the chronologies produced in previous years, we are able to provide an alternative record that demonstrates the immensely diverse nature of events, and that is able to indicate major themes, directions and sites of struggle for global civil society.

Developing alternative data for studying global civil society

The particular aims of our chronology have required innovative processes for data collection, and we are continually trying to evolve our methodology. From the outset we did not want to be limited by the mainstream media. We needed to collect information about a wide range of events and did not wish to pre-judge the types of actions relevant. In line with the overall approach of the Yearbook, we also particularly wanted to ensure we could include events in the South and East.

It was felt this challenge could be used to best advantage by viewing it as an opportunity to compliment the largely statistical format of the rest of the Records Programme. It was also felt that it would be possible to develop a methodology that could serve as a way of engaging directly with global civil society actors, who make up part of our audience as well as our research topic. The Yearbook was always conceived as a dynamic project, aiming to interact with and contribute to global civil society as well as understand and map it.

The network of correspondents and chronology data are our only specially commissioned data source, to date, and form a type of pilot study for the further development of the Data Programme. Currently, the Global Civil Society Programme at LSE and Heidelberg University are redeveloping the Data Programme, including the chronology. Through the use of new communications technologies we aim to standardise and make more accessible our data collection process. Information about our new plans will be uploaded to LSE's Centre for the Study of Global Governance website in due course. In the meantime, for further discussions of developing alternative data sources and methodological issues, see Timms and Stares, (2007) at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/PDFs/Mappingglobalinequality.pdf>.

Our thanks go out to all the correspondents who have contributed to this chronology through their careful documentation, collaboration and enthusiasm for the project.

Global civil society events May 2007–April 2008

May 2007

1 May

Demonstrations to highlight the need for improved worker's rights and conditions of employment are held around the world on International Labour Day, as well as diverse events to celebrate the achievements of working people. For example, in Cambodia an open letter signed by 10 union federations, 74 Cambodian civil society organisations and 158 international civil society organisations calling for justice and an end to violence against trade union leaders is published in a national newspaper. In Iran a protest rally is attended by 7,000 despite threats from the authorities. Demonstrators call for improved conditions, equality and a rise in the minimum wage. In Istanbul, one million demonstrators use the opportunity to protest the government's choice of presidential candidate, with 600 arrests made when the march turns violent. In London, as well as 'space hijacking' in the financial district of the city by anti-capitalist protesters dressed as pigs in suits, 2,468 citizens protest against restrictive laws concerning public demonstrations outside the Houses of Parliament by simultaneously applying for protest permits to swamp the system. In cities throughout the US, hundreds of thousands march in support of the rights of immigrants.

4–6 May

The third La Vall Social Forum is held in La Vall d'Uixó, Paris. This year, themes include alternative economic models, urbanisation, immigration, social movement cooperation and ecological crisis.

14 May

An anti-government strike in Pakistan brings thousands of people to protest on the streets, including a rally of 2,500 lawyers in Lahore, demonstrating to protect the independence of the judiciary. Protests turn to riots in Karachi, which sees the worst street violence in the country for more than 40 years, with 41 people killed and over 150 injured.

16 May

Canadians protest outside Ottawa's Russian Embassy over Russia's deportation of Professor Gao Chunman to China. Gao, a Falun Gong adherent who fled persecution in China before gaining United Nations refugee status in St. Petersburg, is the latest case of repatriation in violation of international law, due to pressure from Beijing.

20 May

Hundreds of people in the city of Wuhan gather outdoors to hold what they say is the first grassroots human rights conference in the People's Republic of China. Their main grievances concern forced eviction and demolition of their homes, which is seen to be linked to official profiteering from real estate deals.

20 May

In Amsterdam, the Netherlands, the national Dutch Social Forum is held with over 1,200 participants under the banner 'people and environment above profit!' The event is also used to mobilise against the G8 and prepare for actions at the forthcoming G8 meetings in Germany in June. Protest slogans are written on a 40 metre wall of the American Consulate.

21 May

Throughout Romania, thousands of taxi drivers and their supporters hold protests in 25 cities to protest against a new system of obtaining licences by auction. The organisers estimate this will result in bankruptcy for 90 per cent of drivers, who are already struggling to cope with EU legislation.

27 May

In Burma, pro-democracy activists gather strength as 500 defy government bans to march through Rangoon and release balloons with pro-democracy slogans on them.

June 2007

1 June

One million text messages of protest are sent as part of the world's largest ever text message campaign, to stop the building of a chemical factory in Xiamen, China. Together with street demonstrations involving more than 7,000 protesters, the campaign successfully results in the suspension of plans.

4 June

While some 50,000 Hong Kong residents hold a candlelight vigil on the eighteenth anniversary of the 1989 Beijing massacre, approximately 200 demonstrators gather on Tiananmen Square for the same purpose. Police immediately arrest them.

6–8 June

The G8 summit takes place in Heiligendamm, a sea resort in the north of Germany. An alternative summit is simultaneously held in Rostock. This provides activists with a forum for debate on concepts for a peaceful, just and sustainable world. The participants demand that the G8 poverty reduction strategy is rethought due to the lack of progress since targets were agreed at Gleneagles two years previously.

9 June

100,000 people from social movements, pacifist and anti-war networks, radical left groups, students' collectives, and trade unions, demonstrate against the war in Iraq and Afghanistan to coincide with the visit of US President George Bush to Rome.

10 June

800 Shanghai residents, mostly those who lost their homes through forced demolition and relocation, sign and publish an open letter online stating: 'We want human rights, not the Olympics.' The letter becomes a petition, attracting thousands of signatures. The organiser is arrested and allegedly tortured.



12 June

The International Day Against Child Labour is marked by a coalition of organisations working to eradicate the exploitation of children. Some civil society groups welcome the signing of a new global partnership against child labour in agriculture, drawn up by the International Labour Organisation and signed by five of the most significant organisations in the agricultural industry. An estimated 70 per cent of child labourers work in some form of agriculture, thought to total approximately 132 million children aged between 5-14 years old worldwide.

15 June

Campaigners celebrate a victory for non-violent protest when the 'Pine Gap Four' receive fines rather than prison sentences for trespassing on a US/Australian satellite tracking station near Alice Springs in central Australia.

20 June

Campaigners in Ethiopia celebrate victory as Starbucks signs an agreement ending a trade dispute over the country's right to use its speciality coffee names Harar, Sidamo and Yirgacheffe. The action was led by Oxfam International, bringing together a number of civil society organisations within and beyond Ethiopia, and is seen to have significance for a number of other cases.

21–24 June

The London Regional Social Forum takes place in London, Ontario in Canada, under the banner 'A Better World is Possible'. No charge is made to attend the event and childcare is provided free of charge. The aim of this annual forum is to provide time and space for the sharing of experience, ideas, information and networks.

24–27 June

The first Congolese Social Forum is held in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Launched with a 10km march, the forum's 5000 participants subsequently take part in 90 workshops and events.

27 June

Human rights groups demonstrate to call for an EU travel ban on the Mayor of Moscow, Yuri Luzhkov, after he vetoed plans for the first Moscow Gay Pride event.

27 June – 1 July

After several years planning, the first US national social forum is held in Atlanta, Georgia, with 10,000 participants from over 100 American civil society organisations and 400 international delegates from 68 countries. To the World Social Forum slogan 'Another World is Possible' the forum adds 'Another US is Necessary'. The forum opens with a mass march through the streets of Atlanta followed by events throughout the city: major themes include Gulf coast reconstruction in the aftermath of the Katrina hurricane, militarism and prisons, indigenous voices, immigrant rights, gender and sexuality, and workers' rights in the global economy. Mainstream media coverage of the forum is virtually non-existent.

28–30 June

The Civil Society Development Forum takes place in Geneva, with 600 participants, from 300 organisations representing 75 countries, under the theme 'A Platform for Development: Countdown to 2015'. The forum was convened by the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations, in cooperation with the UN Millennium Campaign and other networks, such as ActionAid International, Civicus and the Global Call to Action against Poverty.

29 June

In the largest group deportation of its kind, over 600 Taiwanese Falun Gong practitioners, travelling with valid passports and visas, are denied entry to Hong Kong after landing there and returned to Taiwan. The Taiwanese members of this non-violent meditation discipline had planned on joining human rights activities surrounding the 10th anniversary of Hong Kong's return to China.

July 2007

10 July

Bedouin activists and their supporters celebrate partial victory as 29 protesters are released. They had been detained during three months of demonstrations against police harassment of the Bedouin people of the Sinai.

13 July

The National Union of Journalists, together with international campaigners for the freedom of the press, voice concern over the new anti-terrorism laws introduced by the government in the Philippines. They claim that the new laws allow the government to label anyone they wish as a terrorist.

16 July

In Suriname, indigenous groups and their supporters claim the French Army based in French Guinea have forced them to cease hunting and fishing on a nearby stretch of land. Campaigners take their demands for this to be rectified and a petition from the Organisation of Indigenous People in Suriname, to the Suriname government and French ambassador.

17 July

Civil rights campaigners in Singapore and beyond urge the Government to lift a ban on a film about the life of Said Zahari, the Singaporean journalist who spent 17 years as a political prisoner without trial.

19 July

Anti-nuclear and environment campaigners in Japan and Indonesia join forces to urge the Indonesian government to halt plans to build a nuclear power plant on the island of Java, next to the dormant volcano. Activists point to a plant in Kashiwazaki, Japan, which the authorities shutdown following earthquakes.





20 July

Environment campaigners praise the decision by Cusco's regional government in Peru to ban the research, planting, sale, and transportation of genetically modified crops, so as to protect native Andean varieties.

25 July

International anti-slavery campaigners celebrate victory as the government of Mozambique finally approves a law to stop human trafficking, which is a huge problem in the country, with more than 1,000 children and women being trafficked to South Africa each year.

August 2007

2–5 August

The second Northeast Brazilian Social Forum is held in Salvador, in the state of Bahia, Brazil.

3–5 August

The fourth Siberian Social Forum takes place in Novosibirsk, under the banner 'Progress in Coordinating the Movement'. The organising committee of the Russian Social Forum decide to join this form instead of organising their own event. The Siberian Social Forum also includes an all-Russian assembly of social movements, and the eighth assembly of the Union of Coordination Councils. Over 250 people from 32 Russian regions take part, despite bans from local authorities. The overall theme of the forum is solidarity, with thematic areas including: the right to housing and self-management by inhabitants; the right to work and labour unionism; ecological problems and necessary solutions; the violation of human rights; resistance to the commercialisation of education; and pensioners' problems.

7 August

The South Korean government asks internationally respected NGOs, such as the Red Crescent, to mediate a face-to-face meeting with the Taliban. The Taliban demand UN security guarantees for the meeting, should it take place outside Taliban-controlled territory. The South Korean government and the Taliban agree to hold direct talks as part of efforts to release 21 South Korean church volunteers taken hostage by the Taliban. Two hostages have already been killed.

9 August

As part of an international campaign, a petition signed by more than 57, 000 people, is taken to the Paraguayan government to demand action against the illegal logging that is threatening the lives of the Ayoreo Indians.

15 August

The Burmese military government doubles fuel prices, resulting in protests throughout the country. This sparks a wave of demonstrations and international activism in the following months.

22 August

Anti-slavery campaigners claim that up to 500,000 people are held as slaves in Mauritania, and welcome the move by the Mauritania government to make slavery illegal. The victory comes after years of campaigning by both Mauritania civil rights groups and international campaigners. However, human rights groups say without enforcement strategies, a change in the law is not enough.

26 August

The Quebec Social Forum is held in Montreal, Canada.

30 August–2 September

The Social Movement Forum takes place at Sungkyunkwan University, in Seoul, South Korea, aiming to provide a platform for activists who want to establish alternatives and to consolidate the solidarity of the forum movement. Themes include: deepening interaction and solidarity; a people's tribunal on poverty; irregular worker's movement; and a social movements assembly.

September 2007

3 September

Following the arrest of the prominent Chinese writer, Lu Gengsong, on grounds of inciting subversion, over 1,000 human rights activists, writers, and scholars co-sign a letter to Communist Party leaders demanding his release. The letter decries the intensification of arrests of rights advocates since 2005.

4 September

A two-and-a-half-year campaign by peace activists and Palestinian citizens results in the Israeli Supreme Court of Justice ruling that the Israeli Government has to re-route the security barrier which currently divides the village of Bil'in. Villagers and their supporters have maintained weekly protests at the site every Friday throughout the dispute.

4–7 September

The Sbilanciamoci! (Off Balance!) coalition of 44 civil society organisations gather to discuss 'the enterprise of a different economy', as a parallel event to the Cernobbio meeting of business leaders taking place in Venice. Some 600 people demand alternative budget priorities in order to promote policies based on peace, the environment, social justice, and income redistribution.

5 September

In Pakokku, the Burmese military injure several protesting monks. The lack of apology outrages many citizens and leads to fresh demonstrations by monks, nuns and their supporters. This marks the beginning of a month of marches and growing conflicts between demonstrators and the authorities.

5 September

Environmentalists led by Greenpeace quarantine the Romanian Island of Braila, after discovering illegal Monsanto's GM soya growing there, despite an EU-wide ban.





11 September

As peaceful activists protest against the opening of the DSEI international arms fair in London, their sustained campaign results in the organisers Reed Elsevier announcing they are pulling out of all future involvement in the fair.

12–16 September

The World Education Forum is held Mogi das Cruzes, Brazil.

13 September

A four-year campaign by a coalition of human rights campaigners, including many lawyers, Amnesty International, and citizen groups, celebrate victory as the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service finally agree to revoke the risk certificate of Ahmed Zaoui, an Algerian asylum seeker.

15 September

The Liverpool Social Forum opens its own social centre, Next to Nowhere. This is the culmination of two years work by the forum, and aims to provide an autonomous space for community meetings and the home of an activist community experimenting with the social forum principles, to share ideas, skills and resources. The Centre has been achieved by donations and collective, non-hierarchical volunteering, which will sustain its operation. The Liverpool Social Forum meet there on a monthly basis, with the agenda set at the beginning of each evening by open deliberation.

17 September

Campaigners celebrate as the UN finally adopts the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples after a majority vote, setting out the rights of the 370 million indigenous people throughout the world. However, there is disappointment that Canada, Australia and the US, amongst others, refuse to sign.

18–26 September

Daily pro-democracy protests are held throughout Burma, led by monks, nuns and their supporters, many of whom pin scraps of monks clothing to their own in solidarity. The marches grow to include over 100,000 people, despite the junta's threat and use of violence, leading up to a crackdown resulting in unknown numbers of deaths and injuries, as well as an estimated 3,000 arrests. Protests and vigils are held in support of the Burmese people throughout the world.

25 September

International campaigners against the building of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in India celebrate as the Jabalpur High Court rules that the 91 Satyagrahis arrested for demonstrating (non-violently) against the dam were detained illegally. They are awarded compensation.

28–30 September

The Danish Social Forum takes place in Copenhagen with a focus on renewable energy, ecological sustainability, and local and global struggles over resources.

30 September

Some 110, 000 people take part in a rally on the island of Okinawa in Japan to protest against the Government's decision to remove from school textbooks all references to the military's role in the forced suicides of Okinawa citizens during the Second World War.

October 2007

1 October

Global protests against the Burmese regime's treatment of pro-democracy demonstrators continue to spread. Pope Benedict XVI calls for a peaceful end to the military crackdown, and asks the Catholic Church to support the demonstrators. The Burma Campaign UK organise a march of 3,000 led by a Buddhist monk in London, whilst simultaneous protests take place in cities around the UK. Some 800 Burmese nationals are joined by 80 Japanese supporters for a demonstration in Tokyo, and 300 people demonstrate outside the Burmese Embassy in Seoul, South Korea.

3 October

The International Campaign for Housing and Land Rights 2007-8 is launched against exclusion, evictions, and privatisation. The idea originated from a group of activists - from Brazil, Belgium, France, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Mali and Portugal - who met during the G8 protests in Germany in June. They plan to form a network and campaign for integrating common strategies in relation to housing and land rights in their respective regions. The campaign will involve a diverse range of actions between October 2007 and March 2008, culminating in a parallel summit to the International Real Estate Conference which will be held in Cannes, South of France, in March.

4 October

A peaceful summit to make a 'peace and prosperity pact' is held between North and South Korea, only the second such summit in 50 years.

4–5 October

At the start of the World Zero Evictions Day, activists including those from the International Housing and Land Rights Campaign 2007-8, many tenant's committees, social centres, community organisations and pressure groups, take part in a forum on 'Citizens as builders of the cities of the future' in Rome. Participants from European and Chinese cities work on global-local strategies to uphold the right to housing, respect for human rights, social inclusion, and participation of institutions in building the cities of the future.

5 October

In El Salvador, more than 125 civil society groups organise protests against water privatisation, bringing 10,000 activists onto the streets. The coalition, including many trade unions, calls for the Legislative Assembly to guarantee free water access for all.





12–15 October

In Cochabamba, Bolivia, the World Social Forum on Ancestral Wisdoms takes place, the second time the forum has been held.

14–21 October

A week of Global Action Against Debt and International Financial Institutions is held to demand the immediate cancellation of illegitimate debts across the globe. Throughout the week awareness raising activities and protests are held in 60 countries, with 297 organisations taking part. The initiative grew out of discussions between debt activists at the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January, and has been planned to coincide with annual meetings of the World Bank and IMF in Washington, as well as the annual Day of Global Action Against Poverty.

15 October

International campaigners in the long-running dispute against the Coca-Cola Company's alleged pollution at their Plachimada plant welcome the move by the Kerala state government to bring legal proceedings against the firm. The plant has been closed since 2004 due to pressure from activists.

17 October

In Minsk, 7,000 take part in a march after being granted rare permission from the authorities to gather. They demand to be able to 'live by the laws of Europe - not by the laws of dictatorship'. The permission limits activists to a remote park.

18–21 October

The national German Social Forum takes place in Cottbus, under the banner 'For Justice, Peace and the Retaining of Nature'. This is the second time the forum has been held, and focuses on strategies to promote a fair, peaceful and ecologically sound society.

23–25 October

In Bangkok, activists from grassroots movements, academic and civil society organisations involved in natural resource issues, peasant and fisherfolk groups, indigenous peoples, and workers mainly from the Asia-Pacific region, come together for a conference on 'People's Sovereignty of Natural Resources'. The conference aims to develop a common platform to promote the primacy of people and planet over profit, and to develop a strategy of people's sovereignty in the framework of stewardship over natural resources.

25 October

Mayors, provincial leaders and civil society leaders from 104 nations gather on Jeju Island to discuss climate change, city diplomacy, global governance and other challenges confronting cities worldwide, under the banner 'Changing cities are driving our world'. This is the second World Congress of the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and aims to bring together NGO and community representatives with local leaders to debate key issues in their communities and set the agenda for the global local-government movement for

the next three years. Over 1,000 cities across 95 countries are direct members of UCLG. The organisation pursues policies to fight poverty, improve environmental protection and promote peace.

26 October

In Chad, peace campaigners celebrate a ceasefire signed by the government and rebels, including provision for the four rebel groups to be integrated into the government.

November 2007

1–4 November

The Mercosul Youth Social Forum is held in Florianopolis, Santa Caterina, Brazil.

3 November

Over 50,000 demonstrators take to the streets in Tbilisi, in the largest protest Georgia has seen since the 'rose revolution' of 2003. Protesters express their concern over the growing power of the President.

7–11 November

The No Borders Camp is held on both sides of the US-Mexico border between Calexico and Mexicali. The aim is to create a unified camp despite the physical, mental and political barriers imposed by the international border. Strategies to overcome racism and xenophobia are major themes of the week.

8–11 November

In Santiago, Chile, the 'Summit for the Friendship of Latin-American Peoples' is held. Key themes for discussion include integration, disarmament, biodiversity, sexual minorities, and rights of indigenous peoples.

13 November

Yahoo agrees to settle a lawsuit filed in the United States over the provision of private communication information to the Chinese authorities, which the regime used to jail Chinese dissidents.

20 November

In Cambodia a genocide tribunal opens in Phnom Penh, backed by the UN. This will focus on the cases against those involved in the Khmer Rouge's reign who are accused of involvement in the genocide of a quarter of the population thought to have been slaughtered during that time.

21–23 November

Street protests are held in Dakar, Senegal, against the government-led eviction of thousands of street traders. Subsequently, the government postpones the action until the new year.





24 November

Israeli and international peace activists, coordinated by the Geneva Initiative and Peace Now, hold a rally in front of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's residence in Jerusalem, urging him to reach an agreement for peace with the Palestinians at the Annapolis Conference in the United States.

29 November

Environment groups celebrate as the Argentine government approves a law to suspend all logging in native forests for one year. In future provinces must submit detailed land-use plans before any logging can be approved.

December 2007

1–2 December

Prior to the Asia-Pacific Water Summit for government ministers to be held in Beppu, Japan, a People's Forum on the Asia-Pacific Water Summit takes place there. This is organised because much of the official summit will be conducted behind closed doors, despite claims it will be open to all stakeholders. Organisers are concerned the official summit will be used to promote private sector participation as a solution to the growing world water crisis. The forum aims to develop strategies to resist water privatisation and to promote awareness of the problems, under banners such as 'water is not for sale' and 'water is a human right'. Protests are held outside the official summit.

3 December

In Bali, Indonesia, a forum on Trade, Agrofuels and Climate Change takes place, as part of the parallel events to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting. This is organised by the IBON Foundation, AidWatch and PAN AP to enable environment activists to come together to explore the relations between trade negotiations, the promotion of agro-fuels and climate change, as well as its impacts on the environment and livelihood of communities.

10 December

As World Human Rights Day is marked around the world, five lawyers are arrested at a peaceful march in Malaysia. In response, a coalition of 87 civil society groups defy government warnings and organise a rally in protest.

16 December

In France, the civil society organisation Les Enfants de Don Quichotte is set up to highlight the problem of homelessness in the country. More than 100 tents are set up along the Canal Saint-Martin in Paris; it quickly grows and spreads to other cities. Supporters are encouraged to join the homeless for a night or more in a tent to experience their life, the need for change and to show their solidarity.

16–18 December 2007

The third Summit of the Peoples takes place in Montevideo, Uruguay.

27 December

Protests and riots take place throughout Pakistan as the news breaks that former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has been murdered in a suicide attack in Rawalpindi. Supporters had only recently celebrated her return to Pakistan to contest the presidency of General Musharraf. He had been forced by international pressure to recind the martial law imposed to prevent opposition rallies, and to release 3,000 political opponents. Bhutto's death delays the elections and her son is announced as her successor.

28–31 December

The Third Encounter between Zapatista Towns and the Towns of the World takes place in Chiapas, southern Mexico.

January 2008

17 January

Mobile text messaging is used as a tool by grassroots movements in China to encourage citizens to disavow the Communist Party. The activists, which claims some 30 million supporters, previously relied on special websites and telephone lines organised by Chinese diaspora communities, penning slogans on Chinese banknotes, distributing leaflets, and hanging posters. Many have been jailed for distributing the movement's literature.

25–27 January

The Catalan Social Forum is held in Barcelona, Spain. The forum aims to provide a space for the exchange of experiences, debate, mobilisation and networking between social movements that reject the current model of development.

26 January

A Global Day of Action is marked around the world as an alternative to the annual centralised or polycentric meeting of the World Social Forum. Still under the banner of 'Another World is Possible', this global day of action has been designed as part of the experimental process of the World Social Forum, to facilitate global justice activists gathering in their home towns and cities, exchanging information, developing new alliances, and demonstrating for local and global change. The organising committee argue that this is a new form of mobilisation that can promote inclusion and creativity, as well as strengthen global networks. The reporting of actions via the World Social Forum website is described as a form of action in itself, and in order to build a collective memory participants are encouraged to join the 'global reporting team' by collecting and posting photos, articles, pamphlets, media and video clips, and blogs. This shows that 800 actions took place in 80 countries, involving 2,500 civil society organisations, activity that was relayed via 20 press conferences. The number of people involved is lower than predicted, but with noticeably increased activity in Russia and Mexico. In Russia the action across 24 regions is coordinated by the Union of Coordination Council: social and human rights organisations, trade unions, and citizen groups hold rallies, pickets and demonstrations – in many cases despite





local authority bans. It is reported that the Global Action Day 2008 sees the biggest collective social forum activity in Russia so far. The actions coincide with the start of the Russian presidential campaign, and in some places activists of the Communist Party take advantage of the protests. Major themes of the rallies include dissatisfaction with housing and working conditions. In January 2009 the World Social Forum will again operate as a centralised meeting, in Belem, in the Amazon region of North Brazil.

26–29 January

The Mercosur Social Forum is held in Curitiba, Brazil.

29 January

Labour rights activists celebrate victory as a court case accusing them of defamation is dropped following international criticism. The Clean Clothes Campaign and the Indian Committee of the Netherlands were accused by Fibre Fabrics International (FFI) and their subsidiary JKPL, of illegally publicising claims that the company had allegedly seriously violated their employees' rights. An agreement is signed between the Clean Clothes Campaign/India Committee of the Netherlands and FFI, which sets out a sustainable mechanism for resolving future labour conflicts and protecting the interests of workers. This includes the appointment of an Ombudsperson to consider complaints and a 'Committee of Custodians' to ensure that all parties adhere to agreements made. Workers are able to join a trade union again if they wish. This is seen as an important victory for all campaigners monitoring and publically shaming companies into improving conditions. The outcome was achieved partly due to the mediation of former Dutch Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, and the withdrawal of business by G Star, one of FFI's main suppliers.

31 January

Some 100,000 farmers and anti-free trade activists disrupt central Mexico City with marches and tractors to protest against the removal of import tariffs on US and Canadian farm goods. They argue that repealing all tariffs on cheap corn from North America, which came into effect on 1 January as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), threatens the livelihood of Mexican farmers, particularly the large number who run small farms. This is part of an international protest movement against NAFTA, which has highlighted its impacts on many of the poorest workers in Central and South America, as well as the ecological consequences.

February 2008

10 February

The Internet group Anonymous holds protests in 50 cities in 14 countries to demonstrate against the Church of Scientology. This global day of action marks what would have been the 49th birthday of Lisa McPherson, who protesters claim was a victim of the Church of Scientology's practices. She died in 1995 during 'an introspection rundown', a procedure the Church says helps members deal with a psychotic or deeply traumatic event.

13 February

American film director Steven Spielberg resigns from his role as one of the main artistic consultants for the Beijing Olympics. In a public statement he condemns China's refusal to distance itself from the genocide and human rights abuses being committed in Darfur. An international awareness campaign by peace and human rights activists have linked China with the extreme violence in the Darfur region of Sudan, as money and weapons from China have helped to fuel the conflict which has so far claimed at least 200,000 lives and forced more than 2.5 million people to flee their homes.

17 February

As the Provisional Institutions of the Self-Government Assembly of Kosovo officially declare independence from Serbia, Serbian demonstrators take to the streets in protest. Some of the protests turn violent, with UN property destroyed. In Belgrade, hundreds rally outside the US Embassy and the Slovenian Embassy, which currently holds the EU presidency. In northern Kosovo a UN building and hotel housing EU officials are attacked with grenades. Serbians overseas also mount protests outside UN buildings in cities around the world, while Kosovo Albanians and their supporters celebrate.

18 February

100,000 protestors take to the streets in Vicenza, Northern Italy, against plans to turn a disused airport into a US airbase. The march coincides with the end of Peace Week, which comprised 400 events to promote peace and human rights.

22 February

In the Serb stronghold of Mitrovica in northern Kosovo, hundreds of Serbs continue to protest, largely peacefully, against the country's recent declaration of independence.

25 February

A human chain is formed by 5,000 Palestinians and international supporters, including many schoolchildren and university students, to protest against Israel's blockade of Gaza and the resulting chronic shortages of vital supplies. The chain begins outside the town of Beit Hanoun, and protesters display banners reading 'Your siege will not break our will'. The protest is peaceful, but in preparation Israeli authorities have deployed thousands of troops and police to protect the border.

27 February

A Europe-wide climate campaign is launched in Brussels by Friends of the Earth (FOE) Europe and the band Radiohead's front man Thom Yorke, aiming to get governments and the EU to commit to annual cuts in emissions. 'The Big Ask' brings together Friends of the Earth groups from Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Malta, Netherlands, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK. Nationally, each FOE lobbies its government to introduce legally binding reductions in annual emission. Collectively, the campaign demands that the EU requires all member states to reduce emissions progressively year-on-year.





29 February–2 March

The Alberta Social Forum takes place at the Red Deer College in the city, under the banner 'Leap into action – civil society the new superpower'.

March 2008

8 March

International Women's Day is marked around the world to celebrate the achievements of women and to draw attention to inequality as a site of struggle. A total of 652 actions are recorded in 55 different countries, including marches in Iran, Washington and Vancouver, a silent protest in Taipei, rallies in Bangladesh, Australia and Turkey, a conference in Madagascar, a shared breakfast in Iraq, an educational bus tour in South Africa, and an Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs in Canada.

10 March

Protests begin in Lhasa, Tibet, marking a series of violent clashes between pro-Tibetan independence demonstrators and the Chinese authorities. After Tibetan protesters are shot and killed demonstrations spread beyond Tibet and the Tibetan areas of Sichuan province to other countries. In Washington, DC 1,500 Tibetan refugees protest the bloodshed, and 5,000 march in the Indian Himalayan region of Ladakh. In Nepal, Tibetan schoolchildren hold a protest in the United Nations' Kathmandu compound. When foreign journalists are allowed back in to Tibet on an official tour, about 30 Tibetan monks interrupt the orchestrated visit by shouting in protest. A wave of international protests criticise the Chinese government, many using the 2008 Olympics in China to draw attention to the plight of the Tibetan people.

11–14 March

In Cannes, France, a parallel summit and activist forum is held during the International Real Estate Conference, to mark the end of the 2007-8 International Housing and Land Rights Campaign. Participants highlight the problems wrought by the privatisation of the housing market, and exclusion and evictions.

13–14 March

In Pittsburgh, USA, a conference on 'Good Jobs, Green Jobs' brings together 1,000 advocates representing policy makers, labour rights and environment organisations, and technology experts. The aim is to promote a green economic renaissance, as participants share best practices about how to drive green building, promote safer chemicals, and realise the economic benefits of global warming solutions.

14–17 March

Serb protesters raid and occupy the UN courthouse in Mitrovica, northern Kosovo, critical of the UN's role in the recent independence of Kosovo. Several hundred demonstrators clash with UN and NATO peacekeeping forces. Injuries are sustained on both sides.

19 March

While visiting Canada, China's Minister of Commerce Bo Xilai is served with a civil lawsuit for torture and other crimes against humanity committed against Falun Gong practitioners while he was Mayor of Dalian. Part of an international movement to hold Chinese officials accountable for their persecution of Falun Gong, this is the eleventh such lawsuit served against Bo and the latest of 70 lawsuits filed by human rights lawyers in over 30 countries.

20 March

As one of the alternatives to the Olympic torch, a virtual torch relay is launched in the Netherlands by the Play Fair coalition of labour rights organisations. This makes its way virtually East and West around the world, and is eventually taken up by 12,201 people in 99 countries, who add their signatures to the demand that the International Olympic Committee take action on the rights of workers' in supply chains serving the Games.

24 March

The Olympic torch world relay is launched in Olympia, Greece. This year's theme is 'Journey of Harmony' and should last 85,000 miles, the longest route since the relay began in 1936. However, during the torch lighting ceremony, members of Reporters Without Borders breach security to express their support for the Free Tibet campaign, disrupting the official opening speeches which are being broadcast live around the world. Protests are then held in most of the countries visited by the torch relay. Some of the demonstrations relate to national issues or relations with China, but many focus on the Chinese government's domestic human rights record, alleged complicity in the Darfur genocide, and, particularly, the violent treatment of pro-democracy protesters in Tibet. Some celebrities publicly dissociate themselves from the Olympics, and calls for a boycott are advanced on online sites such as YouTube, Facebook and MySpace, as well as websites and blogs dedicated to the Olympics.

26 March

The Human Rights Torch Relay (HRTR), another version of the Olympic torch relay organised by human rights activists in China and around the world, reaches China. The relay started in Athens a year ahead of the Games and continued through 165 cities in over 40 countries. This alternative relay has featured former Olympians, rights advocates, and other dignitaries. Events included music, speeches, and carrying of the human rights torch, with the theme 'the Olympics and crimes against humanity cannot coexist in China.' Now the torch has reached China, such explicit opposition is not possible. Instead, activists quietly slogan with their own catchphrase, 'One World, One Dream, Same Human Rights.' HRTR posters and slogans appear in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guizhou, Hebei, Heilongjiang, Hunan, and Shandong.





27–29 March

The second Burkina Faso Social Forum is held in the capital city of Ouahigouya, with the central theme of 'regional integration and food sovereignty'.

28–30 March

The Midwest Social Forum sponsors a teach-in on the theme 'organising communities across boundaries'. This brings together grassroots organisations, students and activists to develop collaborative networks and to share organising skills, strategies and tactics to overcome barriers and segmentation within the global justice movement. The diverse workshop programme is designed for novice activists through to campaigning veterans.

29 March

Elections are held in Zimbabwe, with worldwide criticism expressed at the brutal campaign President Mugabe continues to follow to ensure he retains power. International human rights groups around the world condemn the election process as undemocratic, and campaign to force the UN to act. Demonstrations are held outside the Zimbabwean Embassy in Washington DC and the Zimbabwean High Commission in London. The announcement of election results is postponed, and the resistance movement grows, for example with the South African dock workers' union refusing to unload a Chinese shipment of Zimbabwe-bound weapons. The number of refugees fleeing Zimbabwe for South Africa increases daily.

29–30 March

In Saratov, southern Russia, 100 social forum participants from the 25 Russian Coordination Councils hold their ninth meeting. As well as debating pressing concerns regarding pensioners and housing rights, the forum discusses preparations for the European Social Forum to be held in Malmö in September.

30 March

Nearly 1,000 protestors in Xinjiang province, mostly women, allege that Uighur women are being sent to eastern parts of China, with some being forced into prostitution. The Chinese authorities arrest approximately half the demonstrators and block media from reporting on the incident.

30 March

In Athens, the handing over of the Olympic torch from Greek officials to the organisers of the 2008 Beijing Olympics is disrupted by Free Tibet demonstrations, with 10 activists arrested.

April 2008

2 April

The Olympic torch arrives in Kazakhstan for the first time. It is reported that Uighur activists protesting against the Chinese government's treatment of Uighurs living in Xinjiang are arrested by Kazakh authorities and some are extradited to China.

3 April

As the Olympic torch arrives in Turkey the relay is disrupted in Istanbul by Uighur protesters, who are promptly arrested.

5 April

The Melbourne Social Forum holds what is described as a mini-forum in the year between its regular biennial forum. The theme is 'eating, moving, living: pathways to sustainable urban planning, transport and food production'.

6 April

In London, the host city of the 2012 Olympic Games, thousands of mainly pro-human rights and pro-Tibetan independence activists protest along the route of the Olympic torch. Several attempts are made to snatch the torch away from officials and to extinguish the flame. Security is significantly increased throughout the event, including a human protective ring is formed around the torch, making it barely visible. The planned route is altered and a bus used for part of the journey. Criticisms are made of the heavy-handed security personnel, who are later revealed to be members of the Chinese security service. The British Home Secretary, Jackie Smith, lodges an official complaint about this to the Beijing Organising Committee. Many of the 80 celebrity torch bearers publically express sympathy with the protesters and some use the opportunity to speak out against China. The British Prime Minister Gordon Brown greets the torch in Downing Street, but does not hold or touch the torch. In an attempt to counter the protests, 2,000 Chinese and their supporters line the route and gather in Trafalgar Square, sporting Chinese flags and the Olympic slogan 'One World, One Dream'.

7 April

The Olympic torch arrives in Paris and is greeted by mass protests. The flame has to be extinguished by officials several times as activists attempt to grab it. Protest banners are hung in strategic locations along the route, for example banners with handcuffs as Olympic rings adorn the Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral; a Tibetan flag hangs from a window of the Hotel De Ville; and a banner across a hotel reads 'Paris Defends Human Rights Throughout the World'. A planned ceremony at the city hall is cancelled at the request of the Chinese authorities. The relay route is shortened and a bus used to transport the torch rather than the athletes.

9 April

'Free Tibet' flags are unfurled on the Golden Gate Bridge to greet the Olympic torch's arrival at San Francisco. Large numbers of pro-Chinese supporters and human rights activists, mainly made up of advocates for Tibet, Darfur, and the spiritual sect Falun Gong, line the planned route. The city's Board of Supervisors previously passed a resolution to address concerns about China's human rights record by welcoming the torch with 'alarm and protest at the failure of China to meet its past solemn promises to the international community, including the citizens of San Francisco, to cease the egregious and ongoing human rights abuses in China and occupied Tibet.' During the relay two of the torch bearers manage to display Tibetan flags, resulting in them being ejected. The demonstrations eventually





result in the relay being shortened, much to the anger of those who have lined the routes in support and in protest. A planned closing ceremony is moved to the airport so the torch can be quickly transported out of the city.

11 April

The Olympic torch arrives in Buenos Aires, for the only Latin American leg of its global journey. Activists present an alternative human rights torch to be relayed simultaneously around the city, in protest at China's treatment of members of the Falun Gong sect. In an attempt to avoid attacks on the official torch, authorities have arranged for 1,200 police officers and 3,000 other public employees and volunteers to provide security.

13 April

In the only African leg of the Olympic torch relay, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Wangari Maathai withdraws from the list of torchbearers due to transport the flame through Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, in protest against Chinese human rights abuses.

16 April

In what some describe as the most sensitive leg of the Olympic torch's journey, it reaches Islamabad for the first time ever and is received by President Pervez Musharraf. However threats of mass protests result in the cancellation of the entire relay. Instead the torch is relayed around the Jinnah Stadium, with over a thousand police officers and soldiers standing guard outside.

17 April

Farmers and social movements commemorate the International Day of Peasant Struggle under the theme, 'Agribusiness Transnational Corporations Create the World Food Crisis: Peasants Seize Back Their Rights'. Events and demonstrations are convened worldwide to show solidarity with farming communities. The theme reflects the organisers' perspective that most of the violations of peasant rights, such as poverty, hunger, intimidations, and physical violence, result from environmental destruction caused by the greediness of agribusiness.

17 April

The Olympic torch arrives in New Delhi, but in anticipation of pro-Tibet protests, organisers significantly shorten the planned relay route. However, Indian officials reject Chinese authority requests to ban all protests, which would prevent the 150,000 Tibetan exiles in India from gathering in support of the Free Tibet campaign. Several torchbearers pull out of the event. Others take part but use the opportunity to express public support for the people of Tibet.

18 April

Some 30 activists from seven countries, calling themselves the Agrocrisis Group, blockade the Cargill company in the harbour of Ghent, Belgium. They protest against the centralisation of the food market by agro-giants like Cargill, claiming this is increasing world hunger at an alarming rate. Other problems highlighted are: genetically modified food, pesticides in animal fodder, the expulsion of peasant farmers worldwide for the monoculture model, the practice of producing a single crop over a wide area, which is seen to bring increased profits; and the greenwash of and investments in agro-fuels. On top of that, activists aim to draw attention to the Round Table on Responsible Soy, about to take place in Buenos Aires, where agro-business, the oil industry and big food processing companies seek a so-called 'responsible soy certificate.' Activists claim this amounts to nothing more than greenwash.

18 April

In Bangkok, the Olympic torch continues its global relay, with several hundred protesters lining the route. One torchbearer pulls out of the event, and the Thai authorities threaten to arrest and ban foreign protesters from future entry into the country.

19–21 April

The Youth Social Forum takes place in Canasvieiras, in the state of Florianopolis, Brazil.

21 April

A thousand security officers guard the Olympic torch through the Malaysian leg of the relay, as confrontations arise between Malaysian pro-Tibet demonstrators and Chinese supporters in Kuala Lumpur.

21 April

Some 1,000 Chinese students gather outside BBC offices in Manchester, England, to hold a two-hour silent protest against the Western media's portrayal of the Free Tibet movement. Some demonstrators wear 'I love China' t-shirts and carry banners denouncing the BBC and other media organisations for their portrayal of China's handling of riots in Lhasa, and the Olympic torch relay. An 'open letter' addressed to the BBC Director General Mark Thompson is read out, claiming that the BBC failed to provide 'credible and independent coverage', so operating double standards to ensure that 'justice and fairness are only applicable to news about western countries'. The BBC denies the allegations.

22 April

The planned route of the Olympic flame through Jakarta, Indonesia, is cancelled due to security concerns and instead the torch is paraded around the city's stadium. Pro-Tibetan demonstrators who gather outside are soon dispersed by police.





23 April

Local campaigners and their international supporters protest in Bangladesh as seven indigenous Jumma villages are burned down by the Bengali settlers brought to the Chittagong Hill Tracts area by the government. Campaigners for the rights of indigenous people claim that the repression of the Jumma people has been intensifying for over a year, the forced settlement of outsiders needs to be reversed, and the Jumma protected.

24 April

Thousands of supporters for both Tibet and China come out in force to demonstrate allegiances in Australia. Chinese students have campaigned for the right to 'defend our sacred torch' in the run up to the torch's arrival in Canberra and city officials have tried to ensure they, rather than Chinese officials, have authority over the security of the torch. Five arrests are made.

26 April

The Zenkō-ji Buddhist temple withdraws from being the starting venue for the Olympic torch's visit to Japan and a parking lot has to be used instead. Mainly peaceful demonstrations are held along the relay route by both pro-China and pro-Tibet groups. Japanese officials insist that only two Chinese guards be allowed to accompany the torch, the rest being Japanese police officers, due to concerns over their treatment of protesters at previous events.

27 April

The Olympic torch arrives in Seoul, South Korea, and is met with violent clashes mainly between Chinese students and those protesting against China's treatment of North Korean refugees. Two of the intended torchbearers boycott the event in support of the Tibetan people, and one man whose brother, a North Korean refugee who defected to China and was executed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), attempts to set fire to himself. Anti-Chinese demonstrators hold banners 'Free North Korean Refugees in China', and Chinese supporters chant 'Go China, Go Olympics'. Korean officials later announce that Chinese students involved in the protest will be deported.

28 April

Continuing its journey through Korea, the Olympic torch reaches Pyongyang, the first time it has been received by North Korea. A grand ceremony and relay are organised, without protest. However UN and UNICEF officials based there withdraw from the official ceremony, stating this would not help their mission to raise awareness of human rights issues and the conditions for children in the country.

29 April

A territorial dispute between Vietnam and China over the Spratly and Paracel Islands becomes a focus for demonstrations as the Olympic torch reaches Ho Chi Minh City. Maps citing the torch route on the official Olympic website originally show the islands as Chinese territory, but protests to the International Olympic Committee bring an amendment. In an attempt to protect diplomatic relations with China, the Vietnamese government keep the relay route a secret and increase security. One protester, who has used his blog to inform people about the torch protests around the world and to call for similar actions in Vietnam, is arrested by the authorities for tax evasion. Other anti-China protesters are arrested as they unfurl banners 'Boycott the Beijing Olympics.'