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LETTER OF SAO PAULO

We, as participants in the First International Meeting of the PAULO FREIRE FORUM, who met in Sao Paulo, Brasil, during three meaningful days, on 28th- 30th April 1998, out of our shared adherence to the sustained and inspirational legacy of Paulo Freire in our lives, here and now vow to commit ourselves to the following values and guidelines being hereby endorsed:

I. To place ourselves at the service of all those who suffer from and who struggle against all forms of oppression and social exclusion, in all kinds of social formations currently co-existing on our shared planet, doing everything possible in our reach to empower them, through dialogue concerted action and solidarity, to acknowledge and amplify their voices and present existence, trying to foster and enhance their participation in the decision-making processes -and- in the implementation of policies intended to include each and everyone person, wherever they live their lives, as rightfully endowed, fully fledged and engaged critical citizens they are.

II. To critically denounce and challenge all kinds of mistifications, desacreditation and undue uses of Paulo Freire's work; whenever his principles and ideas are trivialized, with opportunistic, cooptive and deceitful intent, manipulating public opinion in order to gain populistic "legitimacy" for certain policies and initiatives, precisely meant and designed to be used against the interests of those who are oppressed and excluded.

III. To duly acknowledge and fully respect the particular identities, the cultural diversity and the plurality of conceptions of the other; given that these are not in contradiction with the universal declaration and praxis concerning human rights. These cultural human rights are based in two fundamental principles: firstly, that Democracy is not built on the basis of cultural homogeneity or through consensus and, secondly, that the cultural wealth of humanity develops only when cultural differences are duly respected, preserved, understood and mutually appreciated.

IV. To grant our natural support and solidarity to all individuals and groups who are victimized by all forms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion. We believe that solidarity must govern human relations, social policies promoting the welfare of all citizens and the inclusion of most among the poorest and discriminated social segments of the population. We thereby reject both the neoliberal social project and its version of the state, an ideological project that, in the name of the privatization of the economy, of a postulated market competitiveness and its implied project of social exclusion, is prepared to sacrifice the full and equal enjoyment of universal human rights for all citizens and, moreover, to steal the fruits and benefits of civilization from them.

V. To defend educational policies giving top priority to both young and adult persons, along with the national governments, especially in those countries with high rates of illiteracy. This is based, firstly, on the premise that access and the successful conclusion of high quality basic education constitutes a fundamental right of every human being, to be claimed and exercised independent of age. The second premise is based in the following observation: not a single nation in the history of the peoples of the world has managed to universalize the basic education of children and adolescents without, simultaneously, reinforcing and continuing the education of young and adult persons.

VI. To adopt the legacy of Paulo Freire as one of the references, in the continuation and advancement of the kind of reflection which is conducive to strengthening the struggle of the oppressed, to help potentialize its perspectives and, last but not least, as a permanent instrument of dialogue between women and men in the world. Thereby we reject any kind of orthodoxy or misuse of its principles and ideas as "prescriptions" or models.

We ground our rejection of all dogmas and dogmatism, in a dialectic view, which asserts the permanent epistemological, methodological and praxio-logical reinvention and endless actualization, in the act of

"reading (interpreting) the world", a world which is ceaselessly being transformed by technological innovations and by social restructurations. To misuse the legacy of Paulo Freire as a "model" to follow and imitate implies to betray his own orientation, which placed emphasis on "processes" and not on their "final products".

VII. To place great value in public schooling free of cost at all levels of education, as a historically gained space and instrument, meant to help us organize our reflections on the relevant natural and social conditions and determinations, in such a way as to orient and transcend all of our relative determinations, leading to the construction of societies which are built on solidarity, democracy and justice.

VIII. To fight for freedom of expression and for the implementation of educational initiatives of the organized civil society, whose wealth of accumulated experiences suggests the value of incorporating some degrees of informality and diminishing debureaucratization associated with formal teaching systems. In both cases, the aim is to give priority to policies of continuing training of educators subscribing to the field of critical pedagogics.

IX. To direct all our educational efforts to the construction of alternative pedagogical projects, in contrast and opposition to the neoliberal project in education and to any other proposals objecting to the view that education, science and culture play an important role in the processes of conscientization and transformation of the world. We have in mind and reject, in other words, "educational" projects behind the supremacy of science and technology over ethical values in the realm of human relations.

We propose and stimulate, instead, educational projects that foster spaces of action/reflection on the new forms of exclusion, which result from the production and manipulation of the latest forms of scientific and technological knowledge and practices.

X. To identify the social and popular movements, governmental and non governmental, corresponding to freirean principles, in order to promote their integration in the Paulo Freire Forum. The latter would enable the incorporation of its representations, awareness of their aims, strategies and conquests. All of which would undergo a process of transformation in a center of reference, in a space of sistematization of reflections on the history of their struggles and, in addition, in means of aglutination and articulation of their agents and actors.

XI. To guarantee that the Paulo Freire Forum meets regularly, in order to enable the expression of the plurality of its experiences in critical education, corresponding, in turn, to its various constitutive social movements. Particular care should be adopted in the synthesis and public declarations made by the PFF, not to jeopardize nor risk the identity of the social movements in question nor their specific forms of struggle, in favor of those who continue to be victimized by all forms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion.

XII. To work through various possibilities to establish alliances and collaborations, which would enhance the viability of the previous vows and commitments adopted in this Letter of Sao Paulo. For instance, by promoting the articulation of communication and information networks, the exchange of experiences among communities, popular movements and the members of the Paulo Freire Forum.

Sao Paulo, 30 April 1998

This letter was publicly read and approved, at the closing plenary session of the First International Meeting of the Paulo Freire Forum, signed by over two hundred persons, representing twenty-four countries of the world.