

Brazil's São Paulo Forum and Left Spirit Live on in San Salvador

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Some 66 left wing delegations from 30 different countries, mainly Latinamerica are currently meeting in San Salvador in the framework of the São Paulo Forum, to celebrate and assess the advance last year of elected left wing governments in the region, as happened in Nicaragua, Ecuador, Brazil and Venezuela.

Medardo Gonzalez who is hosting the forum as leader of Salvador's Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, FMLN, recalled the circumstances when the forum first started 15 years ago: the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Soviet Union's collapse, Cuba's dramatic financial crisis and the Nicaraguan revolution defeated by the ballot.

"We were on the defensive and neo-liberalism on full offensive. Some said it was the end of history", said Nidia Diaz another FMLN leader: However today "the defeat of neo-liberalism is evident and several of the forum's members are in government, Lula da Silva (Brazil); Hugo Chavez (Venezuela); Evo Morales (Bolivia), in Cuba the revolution survived and is stronger, and regionally social movements have strengthened".

Gonzalez even recalls that back in 1996 the São Paulo Forum was against admitting Chavez as a member because of his "military coups" background, but today "he's a fundamental pillar" of the regional left and is developing in Venezuela "one of the most original processes in Latinamerica".

He also praised the creation by Venezuela and Cuba of the ALBA (dawn) initiative, which stands for Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas and is the counter proposal for the United States "imperial project" of a Free Trade Area of the Americas, FTAA. So far ALBA's members are Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia.

Gonzalez revealed that the final document of the forum will emphasize the need to strengthen democratic processes, "beyond electoral participation"; promote government policies and structural reforms to defeat poverty (60% of Latin-Americans are catalogued as poor) and create an alternative economic project to neo-liberalism, which defends national sovereignties and promotes economic, political and social cooperation among the peoples of the region.

Alba Maldonado, a member of Guatemala's Congress and former guerrilla is optimistic about the future since in the coming general elections this year in her country, the leading candidate according to opinion polls is Alvaro Colom, a Social-democrat with strong support among the indigenous population.

If Colom finally becomes Guatemala's president, only El Salvador in Central America will still be ruled by "a conservative, neo liberal".

El Salvador's presidential election is scheduled for 2009 and "we are working hard to come up with a solid candidate", said Gonzalez.

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