



# VOICES FROM THE SOUTH



THE  
**KARIBU**  
FOUNDATION

E-Newsletter -January 2014

## Transformative Resistance Addressing structures of power and injustice

*Around the world, grassroots movements, civil society organizations, and global citizens are joining together in their struggle to create a just world. They are utilizing strategic and creative non-violent methods against particular powers, forces, policies, regimes, and economic systems that uphold systems of dominance and injustice.*

*In this month's "Voices from the South," Ranjan Solomon, director of Badayl Alternatives in India, explores the concept of "transformative resistance," i.e. civil resistance efforts that aim for long-term systemic transformation. This article will be the first in series of articles on civil resistance, a priority area for the Karibu Foundation's work and advocacy in the next three years.*

**By: Ranjan Solomon**

*Director, Badayl-Alternatives*



**Ranjan Solomon**

The assault on the freedom and rights of individuals like Julian Assange and Edward Snowden in 2013 is blatant evidence that those who wield power have only absolute detestation for dissent. Crushing political resistance is now a political norm.

In stark contrast to this, defiance has taken root among those who face the tyrannical schemes of the rich and powerful. Despite brute suppression, they have stubbornly chosen to defy power, privilege, and control by the powerful, and have chosen to reverse their disempowerment through engaging in resistance movements.

Armed struggle is a chosen tool of resistance in some situations. Those who are engaged in armed struggles view the state as the enemy of the people, and have lost faith in the democratic option. They feel they have waited too long, and have par-

ticipated in too many elections, only to see that democracy has pushed people further into the margins, further into disempowerment, and further into deprivation. Never have their struggles started out as violent protests. When all peaceful methods have been exhausted, they turn to violence in desperation. This only underlines why the powerful must learn to dialogue and find consensus that is rooted in the claims for justice.

Not all forms of resistance are violent in their approach, by any means. The **BDS Movement** (Boycott-Divestment-Sanctions) is a classic instance of mounting resistance against all odds. A concrete example of this today is a response to the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine. Powerful Israel is suddenly responding to BDS efforts by developing punitive legislation against anyone who campaigns for a boycott. The BDS movement is powered by thousands of committed civil society activists across the world, and is a moral campaign aimed at isolating and holding to account Israel's apartheid system. With increasing frequency, reports flow in with news of well-established academic universities, churches, and trade unions opting to boycott and divest from Israel and Israel's economic entities.

Founded in 1985, the Karibu Foundation is an independent foundation that supports voices from the Global South that provide alternatives to the dominant paradigms of power, distribution, and development.

<http://www.karibu.no>  
[voices@karibu.no](mailto:voices@karibu.no)

*The Karibu Foundation  
Kirkens Hus  
Rådhusgt 1-3  
0151 Oslo  
Norway*



*Badayl Alternatives is an international consulting agency whose mission is to support NGOs and Civil Society groups around the world that wish to effect authentic and insightful changes in global society.*

For more information, visit:  
[badaylalternatives.com](http://badaylalternatives.com)

Photos:

Members of the Palestine  
Solidarity March in Tunis, Tunisia  
April 2013 (page 1)

Participant at the  
“People’s Global Camp” in  
Indonesia, December 2013.  
(page 2)

Photos by T. Hauger



“It is not about mere victories of a short term nature. It is about transforming systems – not only sectors of the system.”

Powerful people’s movements that brought down corrupt and long-standing dictatorships have changed the Arab world in irreversible ways. The **Arab Spring** may have been soured with divisions and uncertainties due to infiltration into their ranks by elements that want these movements to fail, yet fact remains that a new political paradigm has emerged. People know that change is certain when they collectively join together. Corporate controlled interests (such as Western media) may not report the mood of the people-on-the-street, but this does not mean that Arab Spring has faded away.

In fact, the popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia inspired the **Occupy Wall Street (OWS)** - a people-powered movement that began in September 2011 in Manhattan’s Financial District, and spread to over 100 cities in the United States and 1,500 cities globally. Its originators vow, “to fight back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process,” and they aim to reverse the tactics of the 1% that author the rules of an unfair global economy.

In India, twelve “**gram sabhas**” (village authoritative bodies) mobilized people at the grassroots level to reject a proposal for mining by Vedanta - the world’s leading natural resources company with interests in Zinc, Lead, Silver, Copper, Iron Ore, Aluminum, Power and Oil & Gas - in their region around Odisha, India. This has hin-

dered Vedanta’s plans to extract trillions of dollars of bauxite ore through mining, as well as their attempts to rake in colossal profits through land grab, displacement and dispossession of indigenous communities, and assaults on the very identity, socio-cultural and religious rights over the area they inhabited.

The success of the BDS Movement, the Arab Spring, the Occupy Movement in the USA, and the efforts in Odisha, India may not fully represent the emerging democratic norms. Nor do they fully attest to the arrival of resistance that amounts to anything near total victory. As a system, democracy has been twisted in devious ways through corporate acquisitiveness, forms of ethnic cleansing, caste tyranny, eco-genocide, gender oppression, and brute militarism, as a means to suppress claims for justice. Even still, the fissures in the systems that manage power are beginning to be exposed. For no system that is built on immoral foundations can stand the test of history.

The USA is not the formidable force it used to be. Political and economic setbacks have meant that the much-feared ‘empire’ we once knew is in decline. New alliances have emerged as a counter-power to alter the balance of supremacy. BRICS, the association of five major emerging national economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is challenging the hegemony of the US and Europe. Just a few months ago, the USA and its allies

were unable to put together a “coalition of the willing” in a war against Syria, because no more are countries willing to be co-opted as the “willing” in evil adventurist wars that have no ethical or legal foundation.

Transformative resistance has come a long way, but it has a long way to go. It is not about mere victories of a short term nature. It is about transforming systems – not only sectors of the system. While the resistance often takes on a single issue, it must become broad enough to challenge and transform the system. Larger movements for freedom have achieved their single agenda of, for example, ridding a country of a dictator or a colonial power. But there are broader questions of justice that remain untouched. India brought British colonialism to a grinding halt. And then? Caste-class conflagrations remained. Indigenous communities were pushed to the margins. Workers and the peasants remained dispossessed and deprived.

The powerful will never part with power voluntarily. They do so only under pressure. The powers-that-be will at all times seek to infiltrate civil society processes for justice, and will attempt to neutralize their efforts.

Yet the power of justice movements is growing, and their moral arguments certainly have an uncrushable foundation. They will need, however, an alert and agile society in order to guarantee their sustainability. The question is not “*whether*” there will be a just world. The question is “*when*”.

Mahatma Gandhi once said: “First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win.” ■

*Mr. Ranjan Solomon can be reached at [badayl.alternatives@gmail.com](mailto:badayl.alternatives@gmail.com).*