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## The Need for Overarching Organization

Contribution to GTI Forum [Can Human Solidarity Globalize?](#)

Francine Mestrum

Richard Falk's [introduction](#) puts the finger on the sore spots: there is indeed a global and broad awareness of our interdependence, but no consequential actions to save humanity; the current system is indeed destructive; the way forward is not localism and tribalism, but a need to engage globalism and human community. And finally, we need to stop the foreclosure of our imagination.

How easy it seems to say these words, but how difficult it is to act accordingly!

The problem is not only our inability to think the impossible, but also that the interests of States and peoples conflict in different ways, making solidarity difficult.

### Raison d'Etat

We used to think of international and global affairs—and cooperation—at the level of States and international organizations. However, States do not always defend the interests of their populations and have developed their own State interests. They have a “raison d'état,” and this is considered more important than people's interests. Hence the now somewhat “old-fashioned” crime of “treason,” when patriotic values are not respected. States are supposed to defend the collective interests, and people are supposed to help and protect the State whenever it was threatened from outside. This was the old basis of the social contract. In today's world, patriotic values do not have the same importance anymore. State interests have been delinked from people's interests.

Today's State actions are not necessarily in favor of their own people; they can be in favor of corporations or merely the ambitious aims of their leaders. Examples are plain to see: from the United States to China, over to Venezuela and Myanmar.

Solidarity between States does exist, but it must be taken with a grain of salt. The vaccine diplomacy of China, for example, cannot be delinked from the country's geopolitical interests, nor can the decisions of landlocked countries in the United Nations to base their votes on whale fishing or development aid.

## From People to People

People do show real solidarity with each other, at the national level with social security and/or insurance systems (with a role for the State) and beyond borders with help for the poor, for COVID victims, for refugees and asylum seekers, and with many charitable actions at all different levels.

Global solidarity is also organized by thousands of philanthropic private funds; though again, these are not always exempt from other motivations linked to profits and taxes.

Many other groups have tried to get organized at the global level, from trade unions—with a real organization and with solidarity—to political families, sectoral movements like feminists, ecologists, and others. Some of them come together in events like the World Social Forum. This solidarity is extremely difficult to organize, since too many people never look beyond borders.

## States and People

There have been various attempts to shift the solidarity from States to people, or to combine them, such as in the interesting concepts of human security and human poverty developed by the United Nations Development Program.

Socialist countries are masters of people-centered solidarity between States, such as the medical aid given by Cuba (though it is paid for by receiving countries and an important source of foreign exchange) and the already mentioned vaccine diplomacy of China. As for the countries of "real socialism" in Central and Eastern Europe, the formal solidarity with brother nations quickly dwindled with the fall of the Soviet regime.

State and people's interests often collide. While governments need resources for their policies and may accept extractivism, people may rightly oppose the destruction of their environment and livelihoods. The cases of Ecuador and Bolivia are telling in this respect.

Solidarity can also be qualified. Social movements may criticize domestic policies of countries like Venezuela or North Korea, but will—and should—oppose all imperialist attempts of intervention.

## A Conundrum for Progressive Forces

These forces of state-centered, people-centered, and mixed solidarity constantly intersect and can hinder or favor real solidarity.

The main characteristic of solidarity is reciprocity, and as long as too few people and too few States are willing to see this reciprocity become concrete, the problem—from colonialism to white supremacy—will remain.

Civil society organizations have been trying for many years to organize for global solidarity. But many of the attempts have bitterly failed. While there was a solidarity fund in the World Social Forum, it did not last for long, while its “horizontal” way of working without any agency made it impossible for structural and long-term solidarity to emerge.

State-level solidarity as envisaged at the UN and other multilateral organizations is also failing because of conflicting interests and a lack of political willingness to act. Even in the more structured European Union, solidarity is extremely difficult to achieve, though the most recent COVID-fund is an extraordinary example of mutual aid.

The only organizations that really succeeded have been the trade unions. Such organizing was imperfect and very difficult, but it has existed and some parts of it remain. It can be an example for other social movements that are now often too afraid of structural cooperation.

It is this confusion between States and people on the one hand, and the fear of organizational hierarchies on the other, that make it so difficult to organize resistance against the destructive effects of current policies, be it at the social or at the environmental level. Poverty, child labor, and

inequalities are growing again, while climate change and the loss of biodiversity are direct threats to our survival.

Yet, real solutions will need organization and solidarity, inevitably. As long as States and social movements do not accept this, the road continues to go downward.

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## About the Author



Francine Mestrum is chairwoman of Global Social Justice, an association for transformative universal social protection and the common good. Her research concerns the social dimension of globalization, poverty, inequality, social protection, public services, and gender, with a special focus on the social commons. She is an active member of the International Council of the World Social Forum and of the International Organizing Committee of the Asia Europe People's Forum. Her latest book is *The Social Commons: Rethinking Social Justice in Post-Neoliberal Societies*. She holds a PhD in development studies from the University of Brussels.

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## About the Publication

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