

**Second Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy
Sao Paulo, Brazil
12-15 November 2000**

**Ethnic Conflict Management:
Federalism and Alternative Models for the Regulation of Conflict
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As Chris Landsberg has indicated, the workshop on which I am reporting is "Ethnic Conflict Management: Federalism and Alternative Models for the Regulation of Conflict". The session was organized by the Forum of Federations, which is a Canadian-based organization concerned with the improved practice of federalism around the world. The focus of the workshop – federalism and ethnic conflict management – responds to an increasing international tendency to look to forms of regionalism or federalism in response to ethnic conflict.

People from over 15 different countries participated in the workshop – with particularly strong representation from Nigeria – and we discussed possible responses to ethnic conflict in countries as diverse as the Sudan, Burma, Fiji and India. Proposed models ranged from secession to a rights-based rather than territorially based approach to ethnic conflict.

Despite the wide range of problems raised by the examples discussed in the workshop, and despite the very specific limitations and possibilities that each different social, economic and political context creates, three clear points of agreement can be drawn out of the discussion.

- 1) Federalism, or regionalization, is not a solution to all ethnic conflicts. Instead, federal models provide a medium, which may allow for the management of some conflicts.
- 2) A fair and effective distribution of resources is essential to effective decentralization.
- 3) A federal solution to ethnic conflict is highly unlikely to be successful if the people of a country are not themselves involved in developing or adopting the model of decentralization. Negotiation and reform making cannot be left to political elites.

This, of course, is the democratic point, and the group stressed the need for democracy, both in crafting constitutional structures to problems, and in the implementation of regionalism. Devolution of power is not acceptable if that power is exercised in an undemocratic way by the regions to which power is devolved.

One profound point of disagreement emerged from the discussion. This was what degree of autonomy, or democracy and recognition, as some participants described it, ethnic groups are entitled to. While there seemed to be relatively broad agreement that some situations might demand secession, many participants would generally demand a balance between the rights of the central government and those of the subnational units.

This report may make the discussion in the workshop sound very abstract. Certainly, we cannot reel off a series of recommendations. But this is due to the nature of the subject. As I have already indicated, there is no "one-size-fits-all" model of regionalization useful in cases of ethnic conflict. Each response must be carefully tailored to specific local conditions.

The value of workshops such as the one yesterday afternoon is that they give people who are dealing with ethnic problems an opportunity to discuss their successes and failures and to explore different approaches and models.

From this point we can draw one recommendation, that is that we should continue to hold workshops like this one, with two related goals in mind:

- 1) To provide opportunities for the exchange of ideas, and;
- 2) To ensure that federal or regional approaches to ethnic conflict do not lose sight of democracy as the proper basis for any system of government.

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