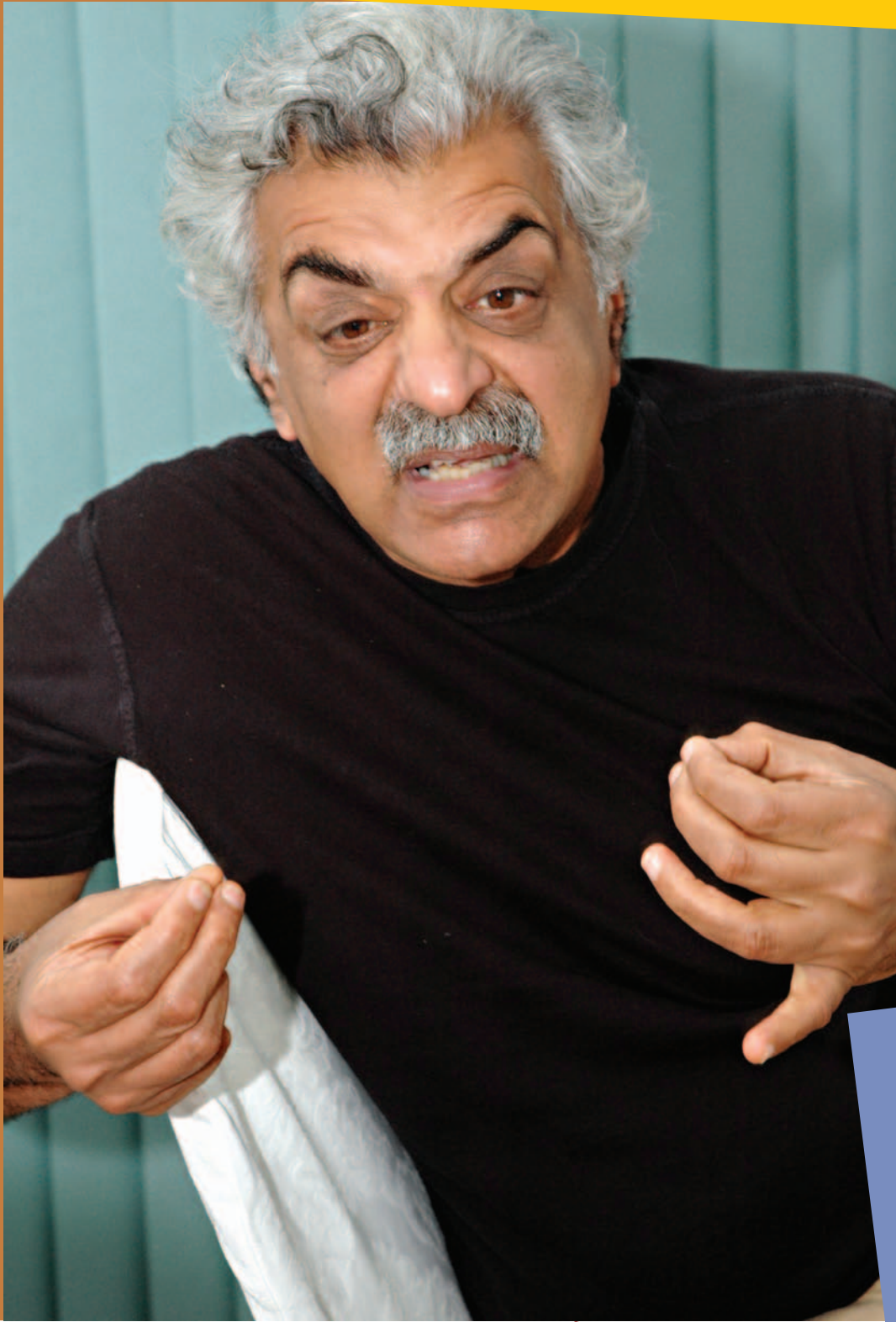


TERRAVIVA

The Independent Newspaper of the Polycentric World Social Forum. Karachi, 24-29 March 2006



Pakistani author and activist plays down expectations

Tariq Ali Fires at NGOs

The Forum is no replacement for real politics, says Ali, as radical as ever. He points at Latin America as a possible model for Pakistan to get rid of its vicious cycle of military coups and corrupt political parties. / Page 3



The Fanfare is On

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A Message From IPS



The World Social Forum (WSF), now in its sixth year, has taken a

“polycentric” form this time around – holding meetings in Bamako, Caracas and Karachi.

After four successful events in Porto Alegre and one in Mumbai, organisers are focusing jointly on Africa, Latin America and Asia, to increase the participation of civil society and better link global, thematic and regional aspects.

These three meetings will show if the WSF still has the ability to gather many thousands of activists from around the world. They will also show whether the forum can reflect the will of change expressed in previous WSFs, giving the forum greater coherence and impact.

In past years, there have been many discussions regarding the future of the WSF: whether it should become an annual meeting where the different actors of global civil society can exchange ideas, or also develop proposals enabling the creation of more synergies between these actors. The polycentric forums will also come under scrutiny as to whether the WSF has been able to expand its geographical and multicultural representation.

As we have done at previous forums, IPS is making an extraordinary effort in 2006 to cover the WSF. With the support of our friends from Oxfam/Novib and ActionAid, we are producing a TerraViva at every one of the polycentric gatherings. This will ensure a better flow of information in each forum and between the different forums, so that the messages coming from the meetings reinforce each other.

In other words, we shall demonstrate that “Another Communication is Possible”.

Good reading!

Mario Lubetkin
IPS Director General

Anti-globalisation

By **Candido Grzybowski**

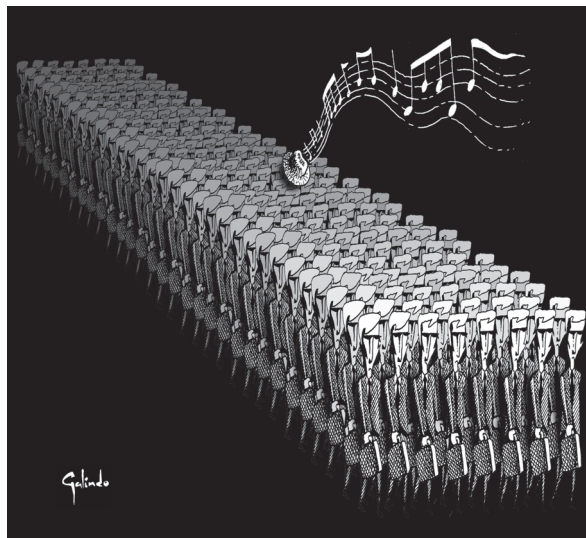
Many, even within the anti-globalisation movement, have claimed that it is running out of steam, particularly its flagship event, the World Social Forum. Yet here we are, brimming with vitality and creativity.

Continuously surprising and innovative, the WSF is moving closer and closer to the people who feel most directly the effects of a globalisation designed to increase the earnings of the major financial-economic corporations. And this year we will demonstrate our capacity not only to grow but also to multiply ourselves, since there will be not one but four forums in 2006: in Bamako, Mali; Caracas, Venezuela; Bouznika, Morocco; and Karachi, Pakistan. We are sprouting like mushrooms even where no one expects us.

Certainly there are obstacles and problems, and new contradictions, but what we are succeeding in building is a marvel.

This will be the sixth forum and as always there will be new challenges. We began in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001. At that time no one could imagine the extraordinary draw and reverberation of the event. In a Latin America dominated by the most extreme globalisation policies of the so-called “Washington Consensus” we managed to arouse hope, to general astonishment. It seemed that it was no more than a dream. However, dreaming is one of the most human of acts, which inspires us to live and to believe in the future.

And so it was that the dream began to become reality: the governments that subscribed to the “Washington Consensus” began to fall one after the other, whether at the polls or from protests in the streets. Latin America began to change course. And while we may not be changing as fast as many hope or



think necessary, the changes are real and are having an effect the world over. Though we are passing through bouts of political turbulence, we are stimulating creativity and the will of a people hungry for rights, for social justice, freedom, and participation.

The transformational political-cultural movement that is rooted in the WSF —which many still don’t consider a true movement but a sort of wave racing towards the shore unconscious of what effect it will have — has won over the world. The initiatives inspired by the WSF are multiplying in every corner of the planet. Their only common reference is the Charter of Principles, ethical in its basic inspiration and radically political in its potential to transform cultures and practices. It has been appropriated and interpreted by a wide variety of movements, entities, networks, coalitions, alliances, and campaigns across the planet, without the need of an Inquisition or a Politburo to examine what is correct and what is incorrect.

The idea of a polycentric WSF, like the current one, grows out of this innovative and human adventure, at the centre of which is the recognition of a common humanity in diversity, solidarity in respect for the human rights of all human beings, and the radical



awareness that the greatest common good is nature and its resources, which we must conserve and share.

With this in mind we should celebrate the fact that the WSF is now acknowledged as a point of reference for the world political landscape. And the fact that leaders, political representatives, and even the “owners” of the world feel obliged to respond to this rebel citizenry, which in its own way comprises a world power, is evidence of the size of the impact that we have had.

And the fact that the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, which is our antithesis, feels the necessity of adopting issues from our agenda, which it has done in recent years; that heads of state and government, as well as representatives from the multilateral organisations, try to stay in tune with the concerns of the WSF; and that each day the media report our activities — are all clear indicators that our strategy is working.

Many think that we are taking a risk in trying uncertain paths.

Guided by a sense of radicalness, we respond that choosing the path of democracy to achieve social transformation is to accept uncertainty as a rule of human coexistence. It is also the demonstration of our vitality and conviction and our condition as citizens of the world, always ready to fight. This is why the presence of the WSF in Caracas, Bamako, Bouznika, and Karachi and many other parts of the world is causing such concern and unrest to the dominant system.

Forward!

Candido Grzybowski,
a Brazilian sociologist,
is director of IBase
and member of the
International Council of the
World Social Forum.

TERRAVIVA



TerraViva is an independent publication of IPS-Inter Press Service news agency. The opinions expressed in TerraViva do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of IPS or the official position of any of its sponsors. IPS gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Action Aid, iBase and Novib/Oxfam for the production of TerraViva.

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“NGOs have taken people away from politics”

Pakistan-born firebrand Tariq Ali wears many hats as a novelist, historian, broadcaster and political campaigner who will remain a dissenter. A radical to the core, he has remained at the forefront of anti-war campaigns. Here he talks to TerraViva about social movements, the need to break the cycle of military rule in Pakistan, and the WSF.

What is the relevance of WSF in Pakistan?

We are not used to listening to a lot of voices, so it is a good thing. But if you think this well-intentioned forum will bring about new social movements, then it won't as these can only start from the grassroots. But it brings together people to exchange opinions and share the state of social movements, especially those in Latin America which have taken over governments and are in open revolt against the U.S. empire, which is very useful. I don't know what's expected, but it's good to have a forum like this. While I don't like to damp down the enthusiasm, expectations should not be high as nothing phenomenal will come out from this event. I wish there was a more regional presence though with – China, Malaysia etc, especially China, where the peasant movement is gaining ground and the working class anger has surfaced.

Will the holding of the WSF in Pakistan affect the military positively or negatively?

It won't affect them at all. With this



“I like to think (of NGOs) as WGOs – Western Governmental Organizations. This is not just peculiar to Pakistan but all over the globe. Nevertheless this is not a substitute for political process. It's not real politics; it's virtual politics.”

civilian veneer that they cover themselves up with, it won't disturb (them).

Can democracy in Pakistan evolve out of something as undemocratic as the military regime in power now?

No, I don't think it can. Pakistan is encountering a sad cycle of political leadership alternating with military intervention. The pattern is all too familiar. Military regimes get rid of political parties who have, in turn, disappointed its people. This is the third big military coup when the men in uniform come saying they are there

to clean up and then hang on. Not a good cycle at all because the alternative, the tiny elite, still controls the masses.

Is there a solution out of this quagmire?

The cycle has to be broken like it was in Latin America; Venezuela, for example.

With the 2007 elections just round the corner, do you foresee a change after all?

Most probably the elections will be

rigged. If this done too openly, it may trigger an uprising.

So you think elections will be used to give military a certain legitimacy?

Absolutely. It will be misused and the pattern to follow will be the same with them (military) forming a political party – the Pakistan Muslim League is forever up for sale. Unfortunately, we don't even have a serious opposition.

Are the people of Pakistan to be blamed for the soup they are in?

I don't like to put the blame on the people. They try everything and then their hopes are dashed. This is again a pattern we are following since the 60s when we had a popular government (Pakistan People's Party). Instead of crushing the tiny sector of industry, they would've been well advised to have destroyed the power of the landlords like the Congress, in India, did.

Have non-governmental organisations (NGOs) helped in getting the voices of the grassroots across?

We can't generalize, but by and large, NGOs have taken people away from politics. It's a misnomer, and I like to think of them as WGOs – Western Governmental Organizations. This is not just peculiar to Pakistan but all over the globe. Nevertheless this is not a substitute for political process. It's not real politics; it's virtual politics.

Do you see light at the end of the tunnel?

Not really. Till we do away with dynastic politics, which in itself is a sign of desperation on the part of the people, not much will change.

You seem pessimistic...?

Realistically speaking, the situation is dismal. I belong to this country but I don't want to be wrongly optimistic. Frankly, I am totally disgusted by what I see. Even after so many years, the citizens of the country have not been provided with basic education and I'm not talking about the downtrodden. Even the middle layer is denied this right.

Zofeen T Ebrahim

Stomping to the beat of the 'dhol' on a freshly carpeted road inside the KMC Sports Complex, chanting slogans 'It's red, it's red, the soil is red with the blood of workers', 'We don't accept the WTO', 'We want a separate Seraiki province', 'Stop your military designs in Balochistan' and amidst merrymaking, music and dance, a strange, rather unfamiliar wave to many a Pakistanis was unleashed when the World Social Forum opened to a crowd of 5,000 people on the evening of Mar. 24.

"Something has changed within me, but it's these 'feel good' vibes I'm getting. It's my first time to interact with such a vast variety of very ordinary people," said a young student from an upmarket business school, patiently directing people towards the stadium where the plenary took place Friday night.

Pakistan, under military dictatorship with an army general at the helm who refuses to give up either his uniform or stand down, has a dismal score card when it comes to social sector statistics. Women's rights are trampled upon and the teeming poor, (seven million living below poverty line) are denied even the basic essentials like potable water, housing, healthcare and education, not to mention a dignified existence.

Thus, the holding of an event as big as the WSF was almost unthinkable. But it happened – and with what fanfare!

The energy excluded by the people brought the place alive, although the opening speeches were all too predictable, chastising governments, with the U.S. government on top of their hate list. The speakers included Moema Miranda of Brazil, Gustav Masia, vice president of the France-based resistance group ATTAC, Irene Leene from Ecuador, Tariq Ali, a prominent Pakistani-born progressive writer from Britain, Jose Miguel Hernandez from Cuba,



Photos: Mohammad Ahmed

Fanfare, predictable speeches open WSF

Basil Manning from South Africa, Nirmala Desh Pandey from India, Jamal Juma of the Stop the War Coalition from Palestine and Asma Jehangir of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

Asma Jehangir thanked the organising committee for "nudging the people out of their slumber" by playing a "tune, a beautiful tune" that favoured "people's globalisation", not the kind that promoted racism and religious extremism. She said people sought freedom from hunger, injustice and oppression, so "you're in the right place and the change for the world has already begun. It's time the ordinary people took the reins of governments in their hand."

Tariq Ali, a Pakistani-born novelist, spoke of how Pakistanis need to adopt democracy and shed the military armour they have become so used to,

if they wanted lasting peace.

Jamal Juma, one of the seven Palestinian peace activists who made it to the forum, talked about the Palestinian struggle and their right to choose their own elected representative. He requested the people of Pakistan to oppose the government of Pervez Musharraf if it decided to recognise Israel. "We will fight till our last breath against American domination, injustice and the oppression of our people."

Yet, however much they cried hoarse against the WTO regime, the privatisation and the imbalance caused due to such callous deals, the small branded mineral water bottles placed in front of each of the eminent speakers were a strong and blatant reminder that they did not practice what they preached. A majority gathered that evening don't

even have access to water, much less clean water.

"The oft-repeated isms — liberalism, pluralism, imperialism, capitalism — have been used far too many times and much too often," said a sceptic who decided to hear what the intellectuals had gathered to say. They slip out of their (leftist elites who make up much of the body of the forum) lips so smoothly, that the monstrosity of their meaning has been lost."

Panning the milling crowd inside the open-air stadium, Zulfikar Shah, an activist working on bonded labour, pointed out: "There are more people from outside Karachi, including those from interior Sindh, than the urbanites themselves. For a city of 15 million, the turnout of the locals has been rather poor."

Akram Baloch, another activist who

feels the chasm between the left and right has widened, observed: "The crowd that you see and the chanting you here is of the political workers of various parties, towing their leaders. Very few are individuals who have come to learn and know about the WSF. But this is better than not having one at all."

However, economist Akbar Zaidi disagrees. "I didn't expect anything like this and am totally speechless. And to think about this same number is standing outside!"

Though "very disappointed" that Arundhati Roy could not make it, young Najia Siddiqi, a special education teacher, thought it was "a crime to be in Karachi and not attend the forum, for "when would you get a chance to hear Tariq Ali?"



SPEAKING OUT

'Heaven Is Not Possible, But...'

Stanislaus Jude Chan and Frances Suselo

Jude Chan



Aziza Siddiqui

Frances Suselo



Roshan Sirran

Frances Suselo



Pip Hinman

Jude Chan



Muhammad Suhaib

When one speaker at the WSF opening ceremony called out "remove violations against women", **Aziza Siddiqui** sat up straight in her chair, and cheered.

Aziza is from Afghanistan, and she was "very excited" to hear her own sentiments spoken out loud by someone else. "We need to fight violations against women," she says. The women's rights coordinator for Action Aid Afghanistan is looking forward to engaging with, learning from, and sharing her experiences as a woman from Afghanistan with people from other countries at the WSF.

"It is hard work, but we must fight for gender balance. In politics, there is only one female minister in my country. We must change this so women can have a chance at an equal voice."

At the same time, **Roshan Sirran**, executive director of Training Human Rights Association (THRA), an Afghan women's rights group, said that even though her country is still in its post-conflict period, the fact that there are now 28 women in its parliament paints a hopeful picture for the rest of its women to have a bigger role not only in politics but also in all aspects of Afghan life. It's the second time Afghanistan has attended the WSF, she added.

Aziza and Roshan's voices are not the only ones in the carnival of ideas and debates at the WSF.

Australian women also "still have a long way to go", said Australian participant **Pip Hinman** from Green Left Weekly, an independent national newspaper from the Down Under. "Even though Australia is a comparatively rich country, Australian women still have fewer job prospects and still lower pay rates than men," she said. "What's more, child care in Australia is very expensive, so you see many instances where both parents in a family work. But unfortunately, women are still expected to do the household chores, even though they are already working outside the home."

Muhammad Suhaib, a Pakistani student volunteer helping with the painting of a signboard calling for suggestions to improve the world, says there are many issues he thinks the WSF should discuss. "There are many issues we need to improve on. Stop violence, avoid war and destruction, return equal rights to women... Every human being should be free from suffering and have the right to basic needs."

Said Suhaib: "Heaven is not possible, but with more events like the WSF, we can help change mindsets, the way people think, and make this world a better one."

Libya has a population of five million. Its oil earnings amount to 35 billion U.S. dollars a year and its annual budget is 10 billion dollars. Yet, Libyan students have to go overseas to study medicine due to the lack of medical universities. On the other hand, Cuba, a country with very little money, has built the best health service in the world. It has been sending sizeable teams of medical professionals to countries struck with natural disasters.

The role of arms race in depriving people of what a country could otherwise easily make available to them is being raised pointedly at WSF in Karachi. Equally being discussed is the role of “the United States and its imperial allies”, in promoting a mad arms race.

While Sep. 11, 2001 was bad, what happened after that is worse, says UK Parliamentarian Jeremy Corbyn. “Before the Afghanistan and Iraq invasion, an awful lot of things happened. More U.S. bases and more alliances were built in central Asia than ever in U.S. history,” he said.

There are U.S. bases in 121 countries – and there are 191 member states of the United Nations.

“The Iraq invasion was based on lies.



OIL POLITICS

No to Arms Race, No to WMD

By Bikash Sangraula

Panel on peace: Another war is always possible

The United States is selling the ghost of security threats in order to create a market for its arms, but activists say it is time to bucking this trend.

It was a way to build a coalition strong enough to threaten the rest of the world. Now, Iran is under threat not because it has nuclear weapons, not because it is building nuclear weapons and not because it has violated nuclear non-proliferation accords. It is being threatened because it is trying to assert its right to build its own civil nuclear energy programme,” Corbyn said.

The invasion of Afghanistan, then of Iraq, and now the threat against Iran is a part of oil politics, speakers pointed out.

“Imperialism is not an old terminology,” said Waseem Sajjad Akhtar, Pakistani senator. It is the terminology of the day with oil playing a key part in imperialist ambitions acting on the globe, he adds. “Pakistan is important because it is a frontline state in the imperial war. Imperialist powers have propped up military rule in Pakistan. For twenty years, this has weakened progressive politics.”

ZOMBIE ROBOTS?

South Asia Rates Poorly on Education

Pakistan has good schools but spends only 2 percent on education. Sri Lanka has the highest education rate in South Asia, but still grapples with child labour.

By Frances Suselo

Education may be among the rights of the child, but many countries in South Asia have poor grades when it comes to empowering its youngsters with skills to contribute to their own societies.

“What our children, and indeed also adults, need is a lifelong learning education that doesn’t just stop after graduation,” said Hassan Nadir from Indus Resource Centre (IRC), a Pakistani NGO. “If we teach our children that an education will guarantee them a good job and a good salary, then they are bound to get disappointed because who can actually guarantee that?”



Peter Breys: beautiful laws, ugly truths

“With lifelong learning education, our children will be learning for the empowerment of their minds,” Nadir said. “And once they are empowered, they will naturally be more informed about their rights because this kind of learning is for your own personal development.”

This point is supported by Wijeyaluxmy Joseph, president of Arising Sun Community Development Organisation, a member of the Plantation Sector Social Forum (PSSF), a Sri Lankan group for child tea plantation workers. “While Sri Lanka has the highest education rate in South Asia,

the world can see that we still have problems with child labour,” she said.

Nadir said that the “dilemma” of Pakistan – which has many prestigious international schools but still lags in literacy and education rates — is it has different kinds of schools for two different kinds of people. “The rich go to expensive international schools and become leaders while the poor go to government schools and become followers,” he said.

“The government is still illiterate about literacy,” stated Hassan. Less than two percent of the Pakistani government’s budget is allocated for education, he added. “The government is more interested in procuring arms than educating their children.”

Peter Brey from the International Federation Terre des Hommes agreed: “There are already so many wonderful child-friendly international laws being signed already, but there is still a problem in implementing these laws.”

Still, children are still children, and while education is important, they still need to have time to relax and play. “Otherwise, our future will be in the hands of zombie robots,” said Brey.