

Collective contribution to the debates within the International Council (IC) of the World Social Forum to take place at Berlin from May 29th to 31st 2007

Tuesday 22 May 2007, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 22 May 2007).

Subject: Evaluation of the 7th WSF

At the end of the 7th WSF, during the meeting of the International Council from 25th - 26th January 2007, certain members of the organizing committee refused to listen to the criticisms and made improper accusations against those who raised their voices. It is very easy to discredit people, be it from the South or from the North, who make criticisms.

We, the signatories of the text, are activists from the South as well as from the North of this planet, who work to reinforce the WSF and are fighting to root it deep in the struggles for the social emancipation.

We are confident that the WSF would remain plural and avoid transforming itself in an elitist show without being of any real use for the genuine struggles.

We would like to summarise as under a series of critique concerning the organization of the 7th WSF:

1. The entry fee fixed for the Kenyans were very high which prohibited a lot of Kenyans coming to the event, as was evident during the Forum. The fee charged (500 shillings) was equal to approximately the minimum weekly wage.
2. The venue was too far from the centre of the city (as well as from the localities where most people stay) which was another factor exacerbating the problems.
3. The organizers hired an infrastructure much bigger than the number of participants that one could have reasonably expected. i.e. 20,000 to 30, 000 (primarily for a high entry fee), one could have even expected 30 to 40 thousand if the entry was free for the locals. The infrastructural expense was extremely high and did not meet real needs.
4. The arguments for demanding a high entry fee for increasing the revenues were absurd since a high turnout was impossible taking into account the low purchasing power of a majority of the Kenyans. The other argument, i.e. uncontrolled entry is equally unacceptable. It would have been possible to register the Kenyans entering the Forum free of charge, in order to formalize their participation.
5. Fixing such prices indicate that the conduct of the organizers was lead by an elitist conception or a complete disconnection with the ground realities (the realities of life of a vast majority of Kenyans).
6. The organizers increased the contracts with private enterprises for setting up food stalls, thereby fixing very high prices for food as per their agreements. This had two consequences:
a) the mass of people could not afford to buy food within the premises of WSF. b) The food prices were prohibitive for the Kenyans and other participants from the developing countries.

7. The organizers made an undesirable deal with Celtel for telecommunications.
8. The organizers should not have made any agreement with the company directly related to the Home Minister.
9. The WSF could have been organized in any stadium in the centre of the city or in any park. That would have allowed: a) reduction of costs; b) almost free entry to all Kenyans; c) a reduction of the food prices; increase the participation of the local people (and therefore, the total number of participants) at all levels (the number of participants and the number of food vendors). That would have equally increased the visibility of the activities in the eyes of the people of Nairobi and rooted it in Kenyan reality.
10. The recourse to voluntary help was visibly very weak and faltering.
11. There was no visible desire to integrate as much as movements and individuals as possible by taking their support for the preparation and a very good organization of WSF. Instead, the power of decision-making and management was limited to very few movements and individuals.
12. The responsibility of the errors does not lie only with the local organizing committee. The responsibility of the international body which was directly involved working with the organizing committee is also linked.
13. The other elements merit a critical analysis. We would like to put them forward for the records: the vast place taken by certain financially strong NGOs; the messages that did not respect women's right or the right to sexual diversity; the fact that the maintenance of law and order was only entrusted with the police; the absence of free drinking water (when 50,000 litres of free water was provided); the fiasco of translations.....

We equally wish to mention the following points:

1. Since the 4th WSF at Mumbai, the IC tried to adopt an approach facilitating even more convergences, notably implying facilitating fusions in order to avoid monologue by organizations.

It seems to us that the progress in this aspect was evident in the 5th and 6th WSF. On the contrary, the 7th edition was a regression to the old style. We were not able to really facilitate fusions between activities. A certain number of movements, not all, organized their activities within their own periphery. An NGO organized around 20 solitary activities.

2. The IC of October, 2006 decided that the 4th day would facilitate the convergences. How could the Kenyan organizing committee decide amongst themselves, 10 days before the inauguration of WSF, with consent of some members of the international secretariat and the secretariat of the African Social Forum, to organize 21 separate thematic assemblies on the afternoon of the 4th day? What is the coherence of such a plan with the idea of convergence? Some of us, passed through one assembly to the other to have an opinion on the relevance of those and its likely success. According to our headcount, those 21 assemblies together drew an audience of 1,500. Some of them only gathered a few dozens participants. Till now, we have not read anything self-critical, any review by the persons who took decisions for separate assemblies: nevertheless, it was elementary in order to prioritize the debates following the WSF.

3. Returning to the past since the 6th WSF, when the 6th polycentric WSF took place, some members, especially from the Brazilian secretariat, persuaded the IC not to meet at Karachi, at the end of March, 2006 where it would have been absolutely normal to make a review of the polycentric process. With the IC scheduled at Karachi we could have participated at the forum in more numbers. Yet, only a handful of IC members could be there.

As proposed by some members of the IC, it met at Nairobi in March 2006 even before the WSF took place at Karachi. As a result, that IC meeting was not able to make a review of the 6th WSF together, and above all, a very few IC members could be both at Nairobi and immediately go to Karachi. That,

deservedly, disappointed the Karachi organizers and the justification given for it was to prepare better for the 7th WSF at Nairobi.

Some of the signatories of this text however, had formulated an alternative proposal which was not taken into account: a) an IC meeting at Karachi, at the end of March, 2006 to make a review of the 6th WSF in its entirety and guarantee the presence of maximum IC members at Karachi (the obligation of 2 intercontinental journeys had dissuaded members to go to Karachi) ; b) call for another IC at Nairobi in the following months in order to prepare for the 7th WSF. Those who persuaded the IC not to meet at Karachi should have equally presented the review of this decision since the chance to support the process in Pakistan was missed as a result of such decision. The review should have equally carried the following question: have we really succeeded in making a better preparation for the 7th WSF at Nairobi by having a meeting there in March, 2006 instead of doing it some months later?

In the same sense, we should ask ourselves why we met in Italy in October 2006 instead of meeting in India or Pakistan as announced initially.

We would like to have an analysis credible and nuanced of what took place during the preparation of the 7th WSF?

In concluding the criticisms expressed above, we estimate that the situation is crucial. A change is certainly necessary at the level of the International Secretariat. We fear that the IC designated a limited group in charge of the mission of the secretariat and that composed of a majority of persons carrying a responsibility in the preparation of 7th WSF (therefore running the risk of reproducing what we estimate was as an error at the level of the preparation of the Forum) and who, during the IC following it, evaded criticisms in order to avoid their part of the responsibility. How does it help the IC to avoid the same errors from repeating itself once again?

We state that during the IC at Nairobi after the 7th WSF, the majority of the speakers carefully avoided criticizing (see the report available in English only (!)) This makes us anxious. Would the IC become incapable of seeing the reality in front of it? Would it become a body which thinks that the review is "overall positive" even when it is in contradiction with the reality? If that is the case, this autism will become detrimental to the WSF process itself.

We are convinced that the WSF should pursue its action, improve the convergences, contribute to reinforce the struggle against neo-liberal capitalism, patriarchy and all other forms of oppression. We have actively contributed to the 7th WSF and we are convinced that it has off course, both positive and constructive aspects. We support the necessity of adopting a set of rules in order to avoid the serious mistakes of the 7th WSF repeating itself.

First signatories, by alphabetic order

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Additional signatures:

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REGISTERED KENYAN GROUPS

1. Kinyui Ndiwa Self Help Group
2. Matheini Umoja Farmers Group
3. Matithini Upendo Women Group
4. Kinyui Helping Hand Self Help Group
5. Umiisyo Kinyui Self Help Group
6. Kinyui Tusaidiane Youth Group
7. Mbake Ngwake Women's Group
8. Kiluluini Self Help Group
9. Witethye Mwene Self Help Group
10. Kithuiani Matetani Self Help Group
11. Matetani Centre Women Group.
12. Itangini Matetani Women's Group
13. Maendeeoma Ngonda Women's Group
14. Mkambas Self Help Group
15. Bila Chuki Women's Group
16. Ngenda Self Help Group
17. Kangundo Post Test Self Help Group
18. Misyani Reliable Ambassadors Youth Group
19. Silver Wonderful Self Help Group
20. Misyani Youth Vissionary Youth Group

21. Kambai Generating Youth Group
22. Ituusya Craft/Young Horticultural Growers
23. Kyeni Kya Makuli Self Help Group
24. Muuo Wa Koma Self Help Group
25. Ukai Self Help Group
26. Ngonda Self Help Group
27. Ivuso Ya Mwatati Self Help Group
28. Ngwate Ngukwate Youth Group
29. Katunga Self Help Group
30. Ngonda Wendano Self Help Group
31. Keyene Ke Muathi Women's Group
32. New Magetha B Women's Group
33. Anti HIV/AIDS Youth Group
34. Mathare Slums Youth Group
35. Magetha Self Help Group
36. Community Health Foundation
37. ST. Teresas Social Welfare Organization.
38. Ukamba Multi-Purpose Self Help Group.
39. Eastleigh North Youth Welfare Association
40. Den Of Hope Youth Group
41. Eastleigh Youth Fever
42. Melawa Youth Group
43. Promise Bin Self Help Group
44. Eastleigh Save Afrika
45. Dem Culture Youth Group
46. Environmental And Aids Awareness Programs Group

47. Third Union Youth Group
48. Dynamiks Youth Group
49. Gadges Youth Group
50. Muungano Youth Group
51. Youth Foundation
52. Visionarry Youth Development Association
53. Eastleigh United
54. Catskill Youth Group
55. Kiarithia Youth Development Association
56. Burning Mountain Crew Youth Group
57. Eastlando Youth Group
58. Eastleigh Sign Writers SHG
59. Millenium Youth Group
60. Digo Welfare
61. Saigon Self Help Group
62. Rokongo Self Help Group
63. Angola Youth Group
64. Kashmir Self Help Group
65. Organisation Of People Living With Aids In Kamukunji
66. Maisha Young Women
67. Msingi Imara Self Help Group
68. Katanga Carwash Self Help Group
69. Pumwani Youth Self Help Group
70. New Bidii Youth Group
71. Uprising Self Help Group
72. Afwaba Self Help Group

73. Ghetto Stars
74. Majengo Self Help Group
75. Slums First Kenya
76. One Stone Self Help Group
77. Azimio La Maji Na Usafi
78. Jirekebishe Self Help Group
79. Kiambiu Development Self Help Group
80. Pumwani Youth Garbage Collectors
81. Wsalys Self Help Group
82. Motherland Self Help Group
83. Decorder Youth Group
84. Lorie Usafi Self Help Group
85. Maisha Young Ladies
86. Iyari Women Group
87. Furaha Women Group
88. Asali Ghetto Women Group
89. Pumwani Youth Group
90. Riyadha Women Group
91. Pumwani In Action
92. Bahati Against Drugs Immorality And Poverty
93. Kiambiu Youth Group
94. Pumwani Sportiff
95. Umoja Youth Group
96. Kasilili Dancers
97. Kamukunji Sports
98. Kilumi Dancres

99. Kyaa Dancers
100. Pumwani Welfare
101. Brooklyn Self Help Group
102. Kamukunji Human Rights Defenders
103. Jean Kachafu Self Help Group
104. Bondeni Youth Group
105. Water Vendors
106. Mara Youth Group
107. Nairobi Youth Against Drugs And Crime
108. Tamasha Self Help Group
109. Katuma Self Help Group
110. Nairobi Country Bus Youth Club
111. Amasha Self Help Group