

Babels and the January 2007 WSF in Nairobi

Thursday 14 December 2006, by [Babels](#) (Date first published: 12 December 2006).

This year Babels will not be taking responsibility for the interpreting at the WSF. As members of the IC, we feel it only right to explain why this decision was taken.

Since the creation of the Babels network, we have consistently fought for certain principles. These are:

1. the increase of language diversity in order to allow people to express themselves in the language of their own culture and not just in colonial languages (including where possible sign language)
2. teams based on a mixture of professional, experienced and 'first timers'
3. teams based as far as is reasonably possible on geographic diversity
4. planning and budgetary organisation working as horizontal geographically diverse teams.
5. working closely with ALIS, we believed in a technically and financially viable option to traditional booths that would also enable Forum archives to exist

We have fought to be recognised as part of the process, and not perceived as service providers.

We have worked against difficult odds to facilitate the process, because we are a part of that process.

Being an activist also means learning to say no, even if this is painful.

The Babels project of working towards Nairobi was born in Bamako, after the end of the polycentric WSF. In fact there were various people from Kenya present, and we are fully aware that Bamako has always been an important stage in the African process

For a variety of reasons, there was a breakdown in communication between the Kenyan OC & Babels.

The result of this was that the KOC decided to take responsibility for the interpreting project. This is something they are fully entitled to do, and indeed local ownership & coordination are always necessary.

We are also aware that an African WSF needs first and foremost to mobilise Africans including within Babels. Which is why some of our

African Babelistas were already working on using training material to prepare new volunteers.

But for a Babels project to be viable, a certain time-frame and co-operation are necessary. Even if money is not available, tickets can be prebooked two or three months in advance, and paid for a month before travel. Tickets and accommodation are the heaviest expense post and consequently need forward planning. Not many volunteers can pay for their own tickets and accommodation.

So rather than leap into a contradictory last-minute approach that would almost certainly end in poor results and blame all round, we decided that we would not - could not - take responsibility for the organisation or planning.

As part of the process, we are making our know-how available to the interpreting committee, and also informing the network so that individual members who choose to help and offer their time and energy can contribute to the Nairobi WSF.

We have sent the following message to all those in our network who had expressed interest in Nairobi:

"You said you were interested in the next WSF in Nairobi, Kenya, January 2007. Please read carefully what follows:

1. Babels is **not** going to organize the interpretation for Nairobi. This task will be undertaken by a Subcommittee of the Kenyan Organizing Committee and will follow procedures decided by this Subcommittee. In other words, Babels is **not** responsible for organizing **any** aspect of the interpretation for the WSF in Nairobi. Please do **not** write to Babels to volunteer!

2. if you wish to volunteer for the WSF in Nairobi, please contact directly the Convener of the WSF 2007 Interpretation Committee in Nairobi: Thomas Christiansen. His email is: thomas.christiansen@sodnet.or.ke. Thomas has requested that volunteers attach their CV to messages sent to him. The WSF 2007 Interpretation Committee said it has already begun selecting local interpreters.

3. for more information on the WSF, see the WSF website:
<http://www.wsf2007.org?>

Please do **not** reply to this message. If you have any doubts or questions about the procedure, please write to the WSF Organizing Committee and **not** to Babels."

It is not the first time a Forum will be held without Babels, and hopefully we can all learn from what has happened to move forward collectively and continue our fight for another world that remains possible only if we all work in solidarity.

In spite of our "absence" from the WSF, we hope that the event is a success.