

# **This is not the World Social Forum I like to attend**

Tuesday 30 January 2007, by [TARIQ Farooq](#) (Date first published: 30 January 2007).

I attended the World Social Forum in Nairobi from 20 to 25<sup>th</sup> January 2007. I also attended the two days meeting of WSF International Council meeting at the same place after the WSF.

What I would like to say is very simple.

This is not the WSF I like to attend for the following technical, political and economical reasons. The WSF in Nairobi was not held at the main city center but outside in a massive sports stadium. Away from the city center meant a very low participation by the local community. The very expensive rent paid to sports stadium also helped the cost of WSF to go up.

The stadium stairs were transformed into meeting rooms for workshops and seminars. This arrangement was more suitable for a lecture than an interactive dialogue and open space to speak about problems.

When a peacock dances in a jungle, no one is there to watch this beautiful tremendous effort of the peacock. So this WSF was like a peacock dancing in the jungle.

The initial decision to hold the WSF in the city park was changed to this massive sports stadium on the reason to "secure" delegates from the local petty criminals. But most of the delegates were staying at the city center. For this logic, the delegates were secure in the day time but were left to mercy of the criminals in the evening. The stadium was around 10 kilometer away from the city center.

There was no proper information center at the stadium. One may have spent hours before finding a meeting room you want to attend. The volunteers were nowhere to be found and if you are lucky, they knew nothing. They were not properly briefed. All they knew that they are volunteers and they will be paid.

There was absolute no translations available. The translations had to be organized by those who had organized the event by themselves. This meant translation in one or maximum two languages. Many were left out of the proceedings. There were no proper justifications by the organizers why they were unable to organize the translations. All they had to say sorry. I heard later that the translation equipment was

bought but was substandard. The organizers had not taken the help from Babel, the organization that had provided translations in at least seven languages during the past forums.

The WSF was very expensive.

For Kenyans, the entry fee was \$8, for Pakistanis and for those from South was \$ 35 and for those from advance countries at least \$100 must be paid for registration.

One of the two local telephone company Celtel was contracted to collect the registration fee alongside with their line. So, a business opportunity for Celtel was there to make maximum profit.

After the protest of the locals and international radical forces and an act of defiance to open the gates for the locals, the organizers of the WAS were forced to reduce the fee for the locals. But who would know that the fee is been reduced.

The food on sale was very much expensive. The normal cost of a lunch was around \$8. The half a litter of water bottle was sold for \$ 0.70 and an ordinary juice packet was sold for \$1.30. There was no simple free water was available. That meant a roaring business for the local and international water companies. All the trade that was carried out in the venue was not on normal local prices but may be ten times more for every single item. The local traders have paid a lot of money to the organizers to rent the place. So they were passing on the weight to those attending the WSF.

The toilets constructed for the venue was like those which are in the airplanes. Very expensive construction must have been one reason why the Forum final cost has gone up 3 million US dollars. There were many tents erected around the venue with no one inside, thus adding the cost.

There was no mobilisation of the locals to attend the forum. No posters, banners or flayers around the city. All the locals knew that there is conference which will bring a lot of business to the city. So, every one has raised the prices. From taxies to hotels, every one was busy in making money from those attending the WSF. It was like a loot bazaar and a one time chance to loot the buggers.

It was the most commercialized WSF of the three I had attended during the last three years. There was a lot of police and military at the venue. Every aspect of building the WSF was organized on contract. The presence of the state forces at the venue was adding to the harassment for the locals and international delegates.

There was a lot of presence of the church in the venue. They had registered a lot of activities as well.. There were some advocating on the abortions and other aspects that the WSF principles do not allow. The WSF is not a religious place for the any religious institutions to preach what they are up to.

The local press reported that the organizers had claimed over 60,000 registered till the last day of the forum. It was a news and surprise for many who were looking where the 60,000 are registered. The opening and closing ceremony was not attended by more than 5000 each.

These two functions were held at a city park. The opening ceremony had a 45 minutes speech by former president Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia boring every one and many left during the speech. I never heard that long speech on the opening ceremony. The former president was praised again and again by the organizers thus leaving a personality cult over the WSF. it was again against the spirit of the forum.

The maximum attendance at the WSF at any one time did not exceeded more than 10 to 15 thousands at the most. In fact, this WSF became the lowest attended WSF so far.

The WSF must change its priorities in organizing the events. It should not be for those who has the money to attend but for those who can not affords to attend.