

Critical Reflections on WSF Nairobi 2007

Thursday 29 March 2007, by [OLOO Onyango](#) (Date first published: 17 March 2007).

This report reflects on the debacle that was WSF Nairobi 2007 while also attesting to some of its highlights. It describes, from an insider's perspective, the genesis of some of the problems and issues that reared their ugly heads at the forum itself and ends by charting a way forward.

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I: Absorbing the Deluge of Local and Global Criticism

It is only today, Saturday, March 17, 2007, ALMOST TWO MONTHS AFTER the WSF wrapped up in Nairobi that I decided to sit down and complete this report.

There are several reasons for this which will become clear as the reader goes through this text.

One reason that I will mention right away is the fact that I decided to sit back and listen to the comments, the questions, the evaluations and the critiques about the WSF 2007 event-these coming from comrades, friends, insiders, outsiders, WSF participants and media outlets from Kenya and around the world. I have two bulging file folders stuffed with comments googled from various web sites and blogs around the globe as well as newspaper cuttings from Kenya. That is not to mention the private email messages, the text messages on my cell phone, the phone calls, the in person conversations, the chats AND cat calls in the streets, cafes and homes of Nairobi and other forms of direct feedback.

In summary, the overall picture that emerges from these critiques is that the WSF Nairobi 2007 event gave rise to disturbing and negative tendencies such as commercialization, militarization and authoritarian and undemocratic decision making in the World Social Forum process. The Secretariat and Organizing Committee of which I was a key member, comes in for some very heavy roasting.

II: Internal Sluggishness at Accountability and Report Back

The other reason why I have been withholding public comment on the WSF so far, despite a lot of requests to give my take from various quarters was because I was respecting our own internal evaluation process here at the WSF 2007 Secretariat here in Nairobi. This has gone at in an excruciatingly slow pace.

Most of the members of the Secretariat were kept in limbo and in the dark for up to three weeks as we waited for some of our “heavy weight” colleagues to convene a staff meeting to discuss the modalities of doing this post-mortem and charting a way forward.

As the National Coordinator of the Kenya Social Forum I had taken it for granted that it would be my task to pull together the report from WSF 2007. I had also assumed there would be no final report before a public report back process to the Kenya Social Forum and the wider WSF 2007 Organizing Committee which comprises of representatives of the Ugandan, Tanzanian, Somali and Ethiopian Social Forums as well.

Instead, someone else from the Secretariat took it upon himself to write to various people about how they should do the report and what areas they should cover. Little room was left for me to contribute to this report other than being assigned to cover social mobilization-even though this was among the responsibilities of the convener of the social mobilization commission.

I have since learnt, second hand, that a hand picked team will soon go on a retreat somewhere to compile a “composite report”.

This latest development is disturbing since there has been NO ATTEMPT to involve me as the National Coordinator in the preparation of this important document. The decision to have this retreat was taken by less than seven people excluding myself. And it was taken at a meeting where no one bothered to call me, even though I was within the precincts of the Secretariat having arrived on time for a meeting and being told that I would have to hang around for a quorum. When I inquired if the meeting was still on, I was blithely informed that it was already over, even though I was right there in the office when the alleged meeting was supposedly taking place. I should also mention at this point that this decision preempted an ongoing process at the Secretariat where some of us had started raising fundamental questions about some of the controversies during the WSF event- the awarding of tenders to Michuki's Windsor and the mainstream Norfolk hotel; why water was being sold and at such exorbitant prices; the allegations of corruption and the way the Organizing Committee responded to criticisms and protests. In particular there were some disparaging and condescending observations, especially about Nairobi slum dwellers made by some of our colleagues that some of us wanted to strongly disassociate ourselves totally from.

Even more disturbing is the fact that as of the time of writing, there is little indication or hope that there will be a public report back to the Kenya Social Forum as well as to the plenary of the WSF Nairobi 2007 Organizing Committee, which is composed of close to 100 representatives from Kenya, Tanzania, Somalia, Uganda and Ethiopia, not forgetting key participants from Zimbabwe and other countries.

It is my fear that we may very well end up with a very sanitized and truncated report that justifies and condones some of the mistakes of the Organizing Committee in mounting WSF Nairobi 2007.

My fear is neither far fetched nor baseless.

Over the last two weeks, I have seen some of the individual reports from people who headed specific

committees or worked on the various commissions. One person pulled me aside and confessed to me that he had deliberately left out a key chunk of his report because he did not want to expose or embarrass certain key members of the Secretariat who had participated in certain shady activities during the tendering process. Another person has flatly told me that he will NOT write his report because of the back lash he may face. It has been interesting to listen to members of the Secretariat, including some of the overseas placements from our partners talk very freely about some of the excesses and howlers they witnessed-but to then adamantly refuse to include those observations in their written reports. I was amazed to see a very cursory report which glibly stated that there was enough water to drink and food to eat-without mentioning that this same water was on sale at exorbitant prices or that one such feeding outlet featured the notorious internal security minister.

Another report, written by perhaps the most high profile member of the Organizing Committee and giving a political evaluation of the WSF refers to "glue sucking urchins from Korogocho" while dismissing most of the critics of the process as condescending Trotskyites from the North.

Clearly, these misleading, disparaging, classist and elitist arrogant sentiments are NOT shared by Onyango Oloo and many other progressive members of the Secretariat and wider WSF 2007 Organizing Committee.

III: Deconstructing the Myth of The Monolithic "Organizers"

It is quite infuriating for some members of the WSF 2007 Secretariat and Organizing Committee such as myself to be frequently confronted with blanket accusations and condemnations that denounce ALL the "organizers" as if we ALL participated in some of the questionable decisions that sparked so much controversy during the WSF 2007 gathering.

It should be stated that some of these dubious decisions were made by literally, TWO or THREE people at the most, often in Total Defiance and Utter Disregard for what many other people sitting in the same Secretariat and Organizing Committee were thinking, counter-proposing and demanding.

For the record, people like Onyango Oloo and others WITHIN the Secretariat and the wider Organizing Committee were opposed, from day one, to the sky high registration fees; we denounced the entrance of corporate players like Safaricom (yes that is right, they were the first to be approached) and Celtel into the WSF process; we pushed for the inclusion of marginalized Kenyan and other groups into the core of the planning for Nairobi 2007; we paid out of our own pockets for villagers and fisher folk to travel from the country-side to attend and participate at Kasarani apart from subsidizing our comrades from the slums and other informal settlements in Nairobi; we were right there agitating for the release of poor people and vendors incarcerated at the police post at the main WSF venue at the Kasarani Sports Complex; we joined in denouncing the offering of a concession and a spot for Michuki's hotel BEFORE it was even invaded; we saw with our own eyes how WSF volunteers were being starved, underpaid and mistreated (including being roughed up and allegedly sexually harassed) and again dished out our personal funds so that they could at least get matatu fare and food to eat when those responsible simply abandoned them; we obtained first hand reports of how our high profile and high handed colleagues mishandled the visiting artistes from South Africa (Yvonne Chaka Chaka), Zimbabwe (Oliver Mtukudzi) and even home grown talent (Tony Nyadundo, Eric Wainaina, Suzzana Owiyo, dozens of progressive artists from working class and slum areas) with the very funder of the cultural programme being forced at one point to almost max out his credit card paying for these visiting artistes to secure accommodation when his own organization had already advanced funds to the Secretariat for this very purpose; we saw indications of lack of transparency and even outright theft and fraud by people hired to work at Kasarani for the WSF

process.

It should be pointed out that what comrades like Trevor Ng'wane detailed in their post WSF reports was first practiced on us within the offices of the WSF 2007 Secretariat in Nairobi several months before January 2007: the dressing downs, the insults, the put downs, the ultimatums, the intimidation and what have you. We witnessed the micro-management up close and personal almost a year before our comrades from the Indian Social Forum started commenting loudly in disgust about it; we saw the arbitrary and opaque decision making trends months before these tendencies emerged in the open during the five hectic days in late January this year.

It is therefore important, as the Christians say, for everybody in the WSF 2007 Secretariat to carry their own cross. Some of us will not be tarred and tainted by the excesses of a handful of people who decided to privatize a very public and of course very global process.

V: The Participation of Kenyan Social Movements in WSF 2007

The publicity and controversy swirling around the storming of the gates at Kasarani Stadium and the occupation of the food pavilion linked to Kenya's Internal Security minister at the just concluded seventh edition of the World Social Forum has contributed a great deal in clouding the true picture regarding the state of Kenya's social movements and how they interfaced with the organizing committee and secretariat which was charged with mounting the monster "mother of all gatherings" in Nairobi this past January.

True, the protests, not just against the high food and water prices, but also against the incarceration of poor people and vendors at the police post located within the Kasarani WSF venue helped to highlight the internal contradictions within the Kenyan civil society sector and underscore the corporate leanings within a section of the WSF 2007 Secretariat itself.

The storming of the gates was a culmination of a long drawn out struggle within the overall organizing committee with some of us (I am the national coordinator of the Kenya Social Forum and a key member of the Secretariat) arguing consistently that we had to remember the "S" in the WSF; in other words, the World Social Forum is basically about people, specifically the marginalized, the poor, the historically excluded and that its major success indicator would be the extent of popular participation, especially by Kenyans.

Regarding the fees, we had made this argument from day one, but clearly some of our voices were not the most dominant in this discourse as we gradually found ourselves isolated voices at the margins of the WSF 2007 organizing process even though we were formally and ostensibly supposed to be having both hands on the helm of the WSF 2007 vessel...

In all fairness to the Nairobi-based Secretariat however, it must be underscored that the wider International Council of the WSF was pushing for even HIGHER fees and at one point was recommending that participants from other African countries outside east Africa should pay TEN TIMES the amount the locals were paying. The WSF 2007 Secretariat in Nairobi simply shot that down.

It must also be recorded that elements within the IC of the WSF were pushing a very neo-liberal line saying that the local hosting committees of WSF events should henceforth be more "self-reliant" with one very high profile guru/founder of the WSF (name withheld) arrogantly saying that the IC was "not a bank" in response to pleas from the Nairobi reps at the IC Parma meeting that perhaps the IC could help with fundraising for the January 2007 event.

The Secretariat had plans for setting up a Solidarity Fund to ensure access as had been the case in India in 2004 when thousands of Dalits who could not afford even the nominal fees participated to the fullest. At the end of the day, we raised very little of the resources to sustain that fund.

All this is NOT to take away from the culpability of a section of our organizing committee who through their arrogant and flippant intransigence set up the conditions that ensured a full throttle confrontation between poor slum dwellers and some of the prominent members of our secretariat.

Collectively, we stand condemned, even though some of us had campaigned otherwise and foresaw the very confrontation months prior to the WSF 2007 event.

I said at the outset that what actually grabbed the headlines during the hectic and heady five days in late January over at Kasarani helped to in a way suppress the real story about the participation of the social movements in WSF 2007.

Let us remember that despite its myriad organizational, ideological, logistical and other snafus, WSF 2007 still managed to set a benchmark as the MOST “international” of the WSF editions so far; it was the WSF with the most widespread African participation so far.

For Kenyans, WSF 2007 remains the BIGGEST ever international gathering to take place on Kenyan soil.

Because of our overzealous overestimations projecting 100,000 WSF 2007 participants, it is easy to overlook the fact that there has never been a conference in our country drawing 46,000 participants. That is a very huge figure by our standards here in Kenya.

Of course the flip side of that is there were hardly any Kenyans, relatively speaking.

It was not for want of trying.

I joined the Kenya Social Forum in early November 2005, having been recruited from Canada in late August of the same year. When I arrived in Nairobi I found the Steering Committee in the throes of organizing the 2nd edition of the Kenya Social Forum that took place on November 25th and 26th 2005. That gathering brought together women, youth activists, community organizers from the informal settlements, social justice advocates and representatives from institutions dealing with housing, human rights and environmental concerns. The nucleus of the future WSF Secretariat was already present in the membership of the Steering Committee of the Kenya Social Forum-an umbrella organization of close to twenty civil society organizations.

It was from some of the participants from the above meeting that the KSF delegation to the African Social Forum gathering that took place in early December in Conakry was picked. We had outreached to such diverse communities and groups as EPZ and flower farm workers, members of ethnic and cultural minorities such as the 4,000 member Yiaku ethnic group surviving in the depths of the Mukogodo forests and activists opposing the plans of the Canadian owned Tiomin corporation bent on strip mining for titanium at the Kenyan coast displacing local peasants and desecrating the ecosystem.

By the time WSF Polycentric in Mali came round in January 2006, we had drawn reps from the Yiaku community as well as young women active in popular theatre not forgetting organizers from landless squatters to be very prominent and visible in Bamako.

In the run up to the formation of the WSF 2007 Organizing Committee some of us made very concerted attempts to draw in radical grass roots organizations such as Bunge la Mwananchi

(People's Parliament) Hema la Katiba, Huruma Social Forum, Haki Jamii, Kenya Socialist Workers Movement and others right into the Organizing Committee itself, often in the teeth of opposition from some of our colleagues who were more comfortable with the more mainstream NGOs. It is crucial to underscore this because contrary to later assertions, the People's Parliament (and one or two organizations that funded some of their WSF 2007 efforts) was part and parcel of the very WSF 2007 Organizing Committee that they were picketing.

In fact, one the eve of the WSF event, I saw an email from the people behind People's Parliament addressed to one of my Secretariat colleagues underscoring a plea from People's Parliament that they were NOT organizing parallel, but rather complementary events to the main WSF activities at Kasarani. In the light of contrary assertions later, it is important to point this out.

The point is that People's Parliament was/is NOT an "outside" fringe organization to the WSF 2007 process. In fact as I write these lines, the Nairobi-based leadership of this organization is busy preparing a statement that will be distributed to the World Assembly of Social Movements correcting what it feels are distortions about their role at the Nairobi event. In my conversations with veteran members of Bung'e la Wananchi/People's Parliament like James Maina, Salim Ngaanga, Korir, Gacheke, Ojiayo and others, it is clear that there are TWO factions each claiming the mantle of "People's Parliament" with the original claiming their group had been "hijacked" by forces bankrolled by another organization which is also a constituent member of the Kenya Social Forum. They go on to make other claims about the political credentials and integrity of some of the folks valorized so much by activists from outside Kenya. I will not go into the personality wrangles and counter-claims within this group. It is just to point out that time will prove that elements within the second faction of People's Parliament behaved in a very opportunistic faction during the WSF 2007 event. It is also a matter of public record that the main core group of Bunge la Mwananchi/People's Parliament did NOT boycott the main event but were actually very, very visible, with their base at the Kenya Social Forum pavilion erected by the Secretariat. For me, the case of People's Parliament provides a somber cautionary tale of how often well-meaning overseas activists will be so gullible as to canonize individuals they know very superficially through media reports as opposed to interacting with real players on the ground.

The inaugural meeting of the WSF 2007 Organizing Committee was held between April 22 and 23rd 2006 at a hotel a mere stone throw from the Kasarani venue. It was attended by 80 delegates representing almost as many organizations-which were spread out across Kenya from both the urban and rural areas. There were also representatives from the Ugandan, Tanzanian, Somali and Ethiopian Social Forums.

A month after that gathering the newly set up WSF 2007 Secretariat embarked on a series of regional mobilizations to bring in social movements and community based groups into the WSF 2007 process. These were both sectoral and geographic. On May 25th 2006 for instance, there was a public forum in Nairobi on "Gendering the WSF 2007 Process". A paper presented at that forum by the present writer later on had a very significant impact internationally in galvanizing debate about gender in the WSF process. At the tail end of July the two day Western Kenya Social Forum took place in the lakeside city of Kisumu with fisher folk, people living HIV/AIDS, small farmers, youth groups, community broadcasters, women and human rights activists in full tow; in mid August, the Kibera Public Forum focused on housing, human rights and the participation of slum dwellers in the World Social Forum; in early September the Coast Social Forum took place in Mombasa; in late November the Central Kenya Social Forum took place in Nyeri; towards the end of 2006 the third edition of the Kenya Pastoralists' Week took place at the Kenyatta International Conference Centre with pastoralists and minorities devoting their forum to building up support for WSF Nairobi 2007.

A very significant breakthrough was the participation of the Kenyan (and wider African) gay, lesbian,

bisexual, transgendered and intersexed communities at the WSF Nairobi 2007. What began as a discreet email sent by one of their organizers to myself blossomed into a series of meetings where the KSF Coordinator met with a very vibrant, militant and focused LGBTI caucus. Contacts were shared, networks were activated, LGBTI events registered, tents and spaces booked and hey presto, come January the Q-Spot was not only one of the largest tents but one of the most popular and highly visible. The participation of the LGBTI community was one of the highlights of the WSF 2007 event and soon ALL the major media outlets were covering issues concerning sexual orientation, sexuality rights and homophobia with some Kenyan members of the LGBTI communities coming out for the first time to their parents, siblings, friends, neighbours and work colleagues. Again let it be underscored that key members of the WSF 2007 Organizing Committee worked hand in hand with the LGBTI organizers to ensure success at the January meeting.

Another major success was the collaboration between progressive Christians and radical civil society organizations to ensure the full participation of the slum dwellers, evictees and street kids at WSF 2007. People like Father Danielle Moschetti of the Comboni Brothers, Boaz Waruku of Shelter Forum, Odindo Opiata of Haki Jamii, Ng'ang'a Thiong'o of Release Political Prisoners, Hassan Ibrahim of Huruma Social Forum and Cosmas Musyoka of Kibera Social Forum to name just a few, worked day and night to facilitate the participation of residents of Kibera, Mathare, Korogocho, Mukuru, Wangige, Mwamutu, Githurai, Muthurwa and several of the 199 slums and poor workers' neighbourhoods that dot the "green city in the sun" at WSF Nairobi 2007. An interfaith consortium took the trouble to register slum dwellers. In fact they later managed to register the largest single bloc (4,000) for the forum. Muslim groups like Muslim Human Rights Forum were not left out either. The militancy of the protests against US aggression in Somalia and the scape-goating of Kenyan Muslim youth could not have made the WSF 2007 agenda without their crucial input. Again it has to be emphasized that all these groups found ready allies within the WSF 2007 Secretariat.

Kenyan workers came in very late into the WSF 2007 process. There were two conduits. One was through the leadership of COTU- Kenya's national trade union umbrella which had been a member of the KSF Steering Committee for almost two years but had hardly attended any meetings. COTU is a conservative body that has alienated a big section of the very workers they claim to declaim for. They entered the process in September 2006 during a special technical consultation on WSF 2007 and force-fed the concept of "decent work"- itself an ILO campaign-into the 9 principles for the January meeting. It later transpired that COTU was more interested in wringing concessions from the local organizing committee rather than ensuring the widest participation of Kenyan workers in WSF Nairobi 2007.

The other conduit was via other organizations like the Kenya Socialist Workers Movement started by young workers toiling in the horticultural farms in Naivasha; the exploited EPZ wage slaves supported by groups such as the Kenya Human Rights Commission.

All in all, Kenyan social movements participated in WSF 2007 perhaps in greater numbers and greater involvement than is perhaps reflected in some of the critiques I have googled and cyber mined over the last three weeks after the forum.

For Kenyans the bigger and more relevant question is this:

What are we going to do with all that energy, all those networks all those ideological perspectives now that our progressive sisters and brothers have gone back to South Africa, Thailand, France, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Tanzania, Algeria, Canada, Greece, Bulgaria, India, Vietnam and so on?

How do we ensure that we can suffuse the 2007 Kenyan election year campaign with issues pertinent and pertaining to workers, small farmers, slum dwellers, cultural and ethnic minorities and

other excluded groups?

How do we ensure that debt and poverty eradication becomes part of the national political agenda?

How do we strengthen the capacity of Kenyan social movements?

How do we ensure collaboration, for instance between Kenyan social movements and formations like Khanya College in South Africa, S.A.L.S.A. in Washington, TNI in Amsterdam and the Dalits in India?

More importantly, how can progressive Kenyans contribute towards a vibrant global social movement focused on confronting imperialism?

Before I wrap up this section, some observations on the phenomenon of social movements:

In Kenya, as in any other spot on the globe, there are social movements and “social movements”.

By which one means to underscore that not all social movements are progressive; not all social movements live and die by the credo of other possible worlds.

There are social movements which want to re-create long bygone worlds; there are social movements whose sole raison d’être is to roll back the democratic and progressive gains achieved in this existing, conflicted world; there are social movements that see the end of the world being nigh, with nothing on the morrow of this world’s demise.

There are massive social movements that are the children, the conduits and the instruments of reactionary local neo-colonial forces which act at the behest of the global imperialist project. Surely such social movements cannot be considered allies of the WSF because ipso facto they call themselves “social movements” or even pass the litmus test of what defines a social movement.

At the same time, there are social movements with contradictory progressive and retrogressive features-in other words, social movements that both struggle against the status quo while retaining contingents who are part of that very status quo. There are social movements which have mobilized hundreds of thousands of their followers against specific elements of repressive neo-colonial and imperialist agendas-while proposing equally scary reactionary alternatives.

It is obvious therefore, that it would be an act of intellectual laziness to come up with blanket sweeping statements about social movements whether in Kenya or elsewhere.

One cannot assume for example, that the mere fact that a social movement exists means that this is necessarily, ipso facto, a progressive thing.

Rightwing religious fundamentalist movements (in the United States, the Middle East, India and of course right here in Kenya) have enormous political clout.

In the United States, they managed to re-elect a Bible thumping war criminal in 2004; in the Middle East they have in some cases almost completely eradicated and supplanted long established secular, anti-imperialist and progressive political movements; in India they have held sway at the state and federal levels; in Kenya they have allies in the State House, in the Cabinet, in Parliament, in the provincial and local administration-a fact starkly illustrated during the macabre hullabaloo about the “Unborn” at the time of the National Constitutional Conference and when fetuses were found dumped in a Nairobi neighbourhood, fueling a strident and virulent campaign against women’s reproductive rights by a motley crew of cabinet ministers, religious leaders, medical professionals and even a few NGOs, CBOs and other CSOs.

Of course, one must also point out that in the history of Kenyan anti-colonial anti-imperialist and pro-democracy struggles, many of the leading stalwarts and unbowed patriots were/are women and men of the Christian cloth, committed Muslims, dedicated Hindus and steadfast exponents of African traditional belief and spiritual systems- Elijah Masinde and Dini ya Msambwa; Bildad Kaggia and Andu a Kaggia; Bishops Henry Okullu and Alexander Muge from the Anglican Church; Reverends Timothy Njoya and John Gatu from the PCEA; Sheikh Juma Ngao of the NCEC; Nazlin Umar of the ODM, members of Muslim for Human Rights, Yusuf Hassan, Abdilatif Abdallah and many other Kenyans of faith who have participated and contributed to our people's collective struggles for over one hundred years.

Conflicted ethno-cultural social movements like Mungiki for instance, have signed up tens of thousands of members to reassert Gikuyu cultural identity in the face of a US led cultural imperialist onslaught-while fighting off disputed accusations of advocating for mandatory female genital mutilation and carrying out horrific revenge killings against "back-sliding" ex-members of the movement.

Paradoxically, the social base of the Mungiki was in the urban townships and rural backwaters amidst working class and lumpen-proletariat Central Kenyan youth- many of them survivors of state organized ethnic pogroms and victims of neo-colonial, IMF driven disastrous policies that have left the majority of the Kenyan wananchi poor, practically homeless, jobless and dispossessed with a seething indignation at the opulent lifestyles of the old money as well as parvenu entrants to the ranks of the pampered comprador/petit bourgeoisie. Recent reports indicate that a wing of former Mungiki members have reconstituted themselves as the nucleus of a more secular, politically oriented national youth movement.

Mainstream Kenyan politicians like the late Karisa Maitha have been known to hijack traditional and spiritual aspirations of rural dwellers to propel very nefarious factional agendas fanning the emergence of ethnic-based violent reactionary social movements; in the 1990s people close to former President Daniel arap Moi exploited inter-communal tribal tensions to create a bloody smokescreen of "ethnic clashes" in order to win elections.

Some Kenyan NGOs and some international Nairobi-based donors work with synthetic "social movements" that are often in reality, brief case "MONGOs" (as in, "My Own NGO") and threadbare CBO "projects" of the said NGO and said INGO. One would be reluctant to characterize these as authentic social movements. At the same time, there ARE progressive NGOs and INGOs that have fostered the growth and the build up of the organizational capacities of budding, bona fide social movements in this country.

Against the backdrop of this complex historically determined social, economic and political reality in our country, the task of mapping Kenya's social movements is therefore NOT a cake walk and that is why it is not easy to give clear projections as to the future directions and growth of these social movements.

That arena is contested ideologically and it therefore depends on the political leadership and class politics of the given formation.

It is our hope that WSF 2007 has helped to infuse Kenyan social movements with clearer and more progressive anti-imperialist agendas.

VI: The Opaque Tendering and Recruitment Process

I vividly recall a response I received from one of the key Kenyan organizers at the very last Secretariat meeting that took place right before the onset of the 7th edition of the World Social Forum.

This meeting happened on Sunday afternoon, January 14, 2007 at the Kasarani venue. This was certainly no routine meeting featuring staffers, interns and development workers. It was attended by members of the African Social Forum, the India Social Forum, the Italian Round Table, the Brazilian Social Forum and many other members of the International Council of the World Social Forum.

Since I had been DELIBERATELY kept out of the tendering committee, but had, even that early, heard disturbing reports of shady goings on, I asked the person who was chairing the meeting to indicate to the meeting who had won the tenders.

I was cut off in mid-sentence with the curt dismissal:

“Oloo you do not need to know who got the tenders.”

Apart from being shocked and embarrassed, I was quite curious at the answer which was said loudly in front of the equally surprised people at that meeting. Not wanting to be a wet blanket disrupting the meeting I curbed my tongue from asking further questions.

By that time, I had already been tipped that the Windsor Golf and Country Club owned by John Michuki had been allocated a prime and strategic location just outside Gate # 1 inside the parameters of the stadium.

This was shocking for several reasons.

In the first place, at a meeting of the Secretariat-and this should be in the recorded minutes- it was decided that food at WSF 2007 would be provided by SMALL, community-based groups (women, youth, slum dwellers) that would showcase the diverse local African cuisine. The food would be affordable even for the poorest WSF attendee. For this reason, when the tenders were being advertised, all tendering fees in regards to catering services were waived to ensure access for the above named marginalized groups. Further to that, there was unanimity and absolute consensus that we would lock out the five star hotels and other mainstream catering outlets-just as we were blocking Coca Cola and its blood stained products from the WSF event.

In the second place, John Michuki is a name which conjures up a lot of negative connotations among Kenyan people. He is the one who has repeatedly called on the police to extra-judicially execute criminal suspects in flagrant disregard of Kenyan law; he is the one who publicly boasted of having ordered the spine-chilling midnight raid at the premises of the Standard media house in March 2006; more notoriously, he earned the dubious sobriquet “Kimendeero” (The Crusher) because of his role as a ruthless torturer and enforcer of colonial terror tactics against Mau Mau freedom fighters during the 1950s. Apart from that, he is one of the wealthiest individuals in Kenya-and it is well known that many of the Kenyan tycoons accumulated their swag through often corrupt means because of their proximity to the levers of power in the Kenyan neo-colonial state.

In the third place, several community-based vendors found themselves literally locked out of the WSF because of the decision to allocate the Windsor Golf and Country Club such a strategic location.

It was quite unsurprising for some of us when Michuki’s hotel was raided by poor people from the

slums. Some of our colleagues who were part of the decision to give the Windsor Golf and Country Club space have tried desperately to insinuate that it was outsiders who “instigated” the protest. This is a view that I find offensive because it echoes the pro-establishment line from the dark days of the KANU one party dictatorship that held that Kenyans on their own were incapable of initiating and sustaining political protests.

What is less talked about is the presence at Kasarani of the Norfolk hotel owned by investors very close to the very top political leadership in the Kenya government.

How did they come in?

Who did they talk to?

Was there some kind of quid pro quo?

Historically, the Norfolk Hotel was a bastion of racist colonial settlers and in the seventies the previous owners of the hotel-the Block family- were very prominent supporters of the State of Israel. Today a bottle of Kenyan beer at the Norfolk costs 250 shillings as opposed to the normal rate or around 100 shillings- underscoring its elitist five star status.

As more facts emerge in the aftermath of the WSF event, I can now see why my questions about the tendering process were blocked.

Two key members of the Secretariat- both of them conveners of two of the WSF 2007 commissions- have revealed to me some of the unsavoury goings on during the tendering process. They told me, in separate discussions, that at one such tendering meeting a question was raised as to how many people sitting on the tendering committee that day had a conflict of interest to declare. Almost everybody in the room-including some of the key decision makers at the Secretariat raised their hands, admitting that they, or their relatives and/or associates had also put in a bid. Bizarre as it may sound, the tendering committee, at least according to these two sources, ended up awarding some of the tenders to the very people deliberating in the same tendering committee!

I have also been informed that when it came to graphics and signage, some key members of the Secretariat practically swiped some of the logos that had been tendered and went ahead and outsourced the work to firms/outlets that they had made arrangements with. I was told this by a member of the Secretariat who was explaining why he left out a key component of his report. This account needs further corroboration before it can be verified as the gospel truth.

Many observers want to know what exactly happened with the 5 million shilling tender doled out for electrical and other wiring work. As WSF attendees will attest, many of the rooms simply DID NOT have power throughout the duration of the event.

Questions have been raised as to WHO gave the order to sell off, at inflated prices, the dysfunctional and practically useless radios ordered for translation when there was no such agreement when the Secretariat discussed this matter.

I should also report (without vouching for veracity or otherwise of the account) a very long conversation I had with a Nairobi-based couple who submitted a bid for catering during the event. I met them on the eve of the event inside the Kenya Social Forum pavilion. They were among dozens of irate would be vendors who were complaining bitterly of being pushed out of the WSF space or not being allocated any spot at all. This particular couple was very distraught (the lady was in tears) as they detailed to me how they had spent hundreds of thousands of shillings to cater for one of the pre-WSF functions only to be locked out by Kasarani Stadium management at 9 pm on the night

before they were supposed to deliver food to the participants of the Africa-Asia Solidarity meeting. They claimed that there was a lot of corruption, especially involving certain members of the Physical Planning Team; they alleged that nepotism was rife and that certain relatives of members of the Secretariat had “won” bids in somewhat unclear circumstances. Now, let me underline that these remain allegations that have so far not been verified or proven. The only way to get to the truth of the matter is by publicly opening up the entire process, especially around logistics and tendering to an independent scrutiny and forensic audit.

Another issue that needs a closer examination has to do with the way the volunteers were recruited, trained and managed. I remember that it was I who developed the WSF 2007 Volunteer Policies and Procedures manual which was later accepted and endorsed by the Secretariat before being posted on the WSF Nairobi 2007 web site. There have been numerous complaints about how volunteers were dealt with. As I mentioned earlier, I was confronted several times at Kasarani by volunteers who told me that they had not been paid. Some of them had traveled hundreds of kilometers only to be stranded in Nairobi without accommodation, bus fare or money for food. One or two women complained of sexual harassment and bullying. I saw a letter written to the Secretariat by three volunteers who were assisting the Volunteer Coordinator in the training and recruitment of volunteers. They were demanding their dues with one of them stating that he had NOT been paid a cent in stipends since he started volunteering in November 2006. I happened to have shared space with these three volunteers and I know from first hand experience that they often left the offices of the WSF in the vicinity of the Yaya Centre after midnight and often as late as three o'clock in the morning. I know this because we often shared the same cab which dropped us to our various homes around the sprawling city of Nairobi. The Volunteer Coordinator himself was often compromised when his well laid plans were countermanded with directives from above. I remember getting a call, at the height of the WSF at around 10 pm from one of the three volunteers pleading with me to intervene because a “stranger” (he turned out to be a nephew of one of the high profile members of the Secretariat) had barged into our offices at night and started arbitrarily modifying the list of volunteers and their tasks. I immediately demanded to speak to him and informed him that I was going to call the police if he did not vacate our premises. He insisted he was acting on the orders of the aforesaid important member of the Secretariat. I reiterated that not even the person whose authority he was invoking could countenance his inappropriate behaviour. The next day when I called that important member, he gave me a tongue lashing over the incident before hanging up on my ear. Still on the issue of volunteers, a Paris based member of the International Council of the WSF informed me that ANOTHER high ranking member of the Secretariat had roughed up a volunteer. I have never been able to confirm positively if this actually happened or not. One issue that deserves further investigation is to look at the budget lines regarding volunteers and verify on a case by case basis if all the people who were paid as “volunteers” were actually volunteers. I will not elaborate on my cryptic comment. Just to wrap up on volunteers I think it is rather callous that many, many volunteers who put in so much hard work have simply been told that they will not be paid all their dues because the WSF Organizing Committee accumulated a deficit in the region of 20 million plus Kenya shillings. I think it is unconscionable that as a Secretariat, we have REFUSED to convene the volunteers to simply THANK THEM for their hard work.

One or two lines on recruitment. There were people who were hired to be part of the physical planning team and others to boost the secretariat in terms of media. In the two instances, there was no attempt to approach me to be part of the hiring process despite the fact that I am the National Coordinator of the Kenya Social Forum. Some of the most serious allegations of fraud, theft and other criminal activity have to do with some individuals in the physical planning team, who may or may not have blood ties with other Organizing Committee members.

Let me reiterate, as I close this section that up to now, I have yet to see the minutes recording the

tendering process-despite repeated requests on my part for this information. Nor have I seen a detailed breakdown of how we spent the money that had been allocated and entrusted to us as a Secretariat by various donors for the running of the WSF 2007 event. I therefore can not make any claims that I know first hand whether there was any misappropriation of funds or diversion of the same. On the streets of Nairobi rumours are rampant that all of us from the Secretariat made a killing stealing WSF funds. I was recently button-holed in the streets of Nairobi by some activists who sarcastically demanded that Onyango Oloo should give them “only” 50,000 shillings from the WSF swag that was allegedly making my personal bank account overflow! These aspersions can be totally damaging to someone’s character and professional integrity, especially if there is NO EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE to back them up. That is why it is important for all those financial transactions to be laid bare for all to see and examine especially to exonerate Secretariat members against these serious allegations of impropriety.

VII: Celtel & The Corporate Branding of WSF 2007

Sometime just before eleven thirty pm on January 19th 2007 I left my front row seat in the Kenyatta International Conference Centre to rush on stage and whisper something caustic to the brash and sauntering MC who was busy telling the audience that the WSF musical concert we were attending was brought to us by Celtel. What I whispered in his ears were words to the effect that the WSF does not have corporate sponsors. This was during the WSF 2007 fund-raising curtain raiser featuring the likes of Oliver Mtukudzi, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Suzzana Owiyo, Tony Nyadundo and other artistes. But I may as well have been pissing in the wind for all over the stage was the garish and ubiquitous Celtel logo. Later on, a bevy of red clad Celtel lasses stormed the stage to perform a jig with the beloved Tuku from Zimbabwe. A few days before this, one of the key organizers of WSF 2007 was all over the news triumphantly pumping the hands of one of Celtel’s corporate marketing representatives as Kenya’s second mobile provider announced a 20 million shilling sponsorship deal with the Secretariat of the WSF Nairobi 2007 Organizing Committee. Boy was I glad that I was not among those counted as present! I remember being dismissed when I persisted in raising questions about the whole idea of corporate sponsorship. My objections started with Safaricom, who actually were the first to be approached. I wondered whether we had looked at Safaricom’s labour policies, their corporate social responsibility record or any possible skeleton in their closet and more importantly, how the whole idea of corporate endorsements and sponsorship would play within the wider WSF family. I was told bluntly that I had taken my left-wing ideals and rhetoric too far and that some people in the Secretariat had even invested some of their money in Safaricom. Talks with Safaricom would later collapse and that is how Celtel stepped in. The whole notion of getting WSF participants to register for Kasarani via purchased air time from Celtel smacked of placement advertising and coercing people to switch to Celtel even when they were already customers of another mobile service. Kasarani was to later provide a captive market for Celtel as it prowled for new, albeit temporary subscribers. Apart from the ideological questions already raised about the whole Celtel/WSF “partnership” one needs to interrogate whether, even on purely commercial terms, the deal worked out at all. Celtel was supposed to bankroll media coverage and flood Nairobi with posters, banners and other announcements heralding WSF 2007. It was supposed to place ads in the newspapers and provide frequent updates via mobile. It fell far short of delivering on these objectives. I remember virtually securing a prime time slot on KTN TV’s popular News Line show to talk about the WSF on the opening day of the Nairobi event. Celtel was supposed to pay for that air time. They did not and the show never took place. They never returned my phone calls and everything about that precious time slot ended in disarray. At the aforementioned concert, the WSF banners produced by Celtel were still being painfully erected a good two hours into the time the show was supposed to have commenced. What was more notable about the banners were that they were Celtel banners with the WSF logo as a casual afterthought

and footnote. Personally I do not know how the 20 million shillings pledged by Celtel was utilized- but I sure would be interested in finding out...

VIII: A Word About Home Stays and Solidarity Accommodation

One of the most publicized fiascos from the Nairobi event revolved around the issue of providing home-based accommodation for WSF 2007 participants from overseas with numerous complaints from would be providers that they had been short-changed and press reports of delegates being diverted from the airport by agents closely linked to the political powers that be.

It started off as a noble idea- securing SOLIDARITY ACCOMMODATION for WSF delegates who wanted to shun the five star hotels and live instead with actual, ordinary Kenyan families. Some of us felt this was more of a political statement rather than a grab for cash. But it was apparent that some other individuals within the Secretariat had other ideas. Unbeknownst to us, a key member of the Secretariat had inked a contract with a travel and tour agent on August 21 to source for “home stays” as opposed to solidarity accommodation. The contract specified that there would be a US\$ 2 “commission” to the “Organizing Committee” from each contract signed. This was curious because it was NOT until November that this matter was even brought up for formal discussions at the Secretariat. I raised the matter vigorously, waving copies of the said contract, but the matter was brushed under the carpet. Instead, I was grilled for allegedly imputing improper motives.

As things turned out, our designated agents, Togo Consultants and Staarabu, lost money big time on the whole home stay venture. Instead, it has since emerged that a shadowy cabal with strong links to some of the most prominent and wealthiest political families in Kenya used their state connections to quite literally offload WSF delegates straight from the plane to waiting vehicles that shipped them to resorts, motels and residences owned by this well-heeled clique.

Lost in all this shuffle was the original idea of solidarity accommodation. It must also be said that as an Organizing Committee we fell far short of our target of raising funds for the Solidarity Fund.

IX: Logistical Snafus and Programming Nightmares

Now we know that the interpretation failed; that the media centre was dysfunctional; that not enough Kenyans attended the forum; that there were not enough programmes; that the volunteers had many challenges; that delegates were robbed, a few at gun point; that there was a communication breakdown between the organizers and many delegates; that there has hardly anyone at the Youth Camp; that there were power failures and serious mix ups in signage; that there were many behind the scenes conflicts; that powerful people in Kenya hijacked part of the WSF process; that there was heavy police and military presence; that water and food were sold at exorbitant prices; that progressive politics took a back seat to NGO hawking, small vendor curio selling and WSF tourism; plus much much more.

What we need to do now is to locate these problems firmly within the organizational context.

Here all of us, myself included, stand indicted, and basically guilty as charged.

For instance many, if not most of the commissions and their respective sub-committees were dysfunctional and ineffective. There are several reasons for this. The main one has to do with the fact that the conveners of these commissions were hand-picked by us (and I include Onyango Oloo in this) at the Secretariat often oblivious to the skill sets of the people we chose. In some cases, the

first time some people knew they were conveners is when someone else called them about it after seeing an emailed list of the Organizing Committee and its commissions. Some commissions, like the Youth and the Social Mobilization Commissions, were paralyzed by their own conveners who simply refused to convene them. I remember a very public spat I had with the convener of the Social Mobilization Commission and her supporters within the Secretariat when I was pleading with her to call a meeting and stop setting up parallel structures that were not accountable to anyone. For my pains, I was summoned to a meeting where I was told that I had “let us down”. The convener demanded my resignation. From that period to the holding of the WSF 2007 gathering, the Social Mobilization Commission never again met. Some of our high profile conveners spent more time in the aircraft jetting in and out of the country attending meetings across the world that they never bothered to report back on to their respective commissions. The largest sub-committees naturally came from the logistics commission. Again the conveners of these sub-committees were basically hand-picked with some chosen more because of their proximity to the powers that be at the Secretariat rather than any identifiable leadership skills and attributes. One feeling expressed to me by a member of one such sub-committee is that he felt that the committees were deliberately set up to be dysfunctional to suit certain agendas. What is undeniable is that gross micro-management from the “centre of power” disrupted almost totally the work of these committees to the point where they became a laughing stock and mockery of the entire process.

In the aftermath of the WSF, some members of the Nairobi Secretariat have mulled over the idea of doing away with the whole notion of the commissions in the WSF process. Instead they posit the idea of “collectives” as tight, task oriented units that can be relied upon to deliver.

Respectfully, I reject this “collective” plan B.

First of all, some of the people pushing this notion are NOTORIOUS for their authoritarian and undemocratic micro-management style of work. A “collective” with any of them at the helm would rapidly degenerate into chaos lorded over by them. I am reminded of the lessons from Freeman’s classic 1970 manuscript *The Tyranny of Structurelessness* where an unelected and undemocratic cabal creates a de facto hierarchy even as they campaign against hierarchies which have at least the saving grace of being identifiable and to that extent, somewhat accountable.

Let us retain the current structures of the WSF commissions at local, regional, continental and international levels. What we need is to empower them and ensure that their conveners are ELECTED by the commissioners themselves rather than imposed from above.

X: Dealing With Constructive Criticism and Resolving Conflicts

I have been almost exclusively employed by social justice and civil society organizations for the last 18 years-most of them being in Toronto and Montreal in Canada. I have experienced a number of tense working environments riddled with all kinds of problems and issues. But I have never encountered a bunch of such intolerant, arrogant and vindictive colleagues as the ones I had to endure during the planning and execution of WSF Nairobi 2007. First of all, the working environment at the Nairobi-based WSF 2007 Secretariat is the very antithesis of the WSF concept of an open space. Authoritarian decisions are made, often without consultation, by people who insist on imperiously chairing every single meeting-a far cry from the rotating chairs I was accustomed to. They draw up the agenda, decide on who can speak and for how long and will not hesitate to cut off, shout down and lecture anyone who appears to be challenging them. I am focusing on two particular individuals even though I can not let off the hook a third table banger who was as intolerant inside the board room as she was “revolutionary” and “inclusive” on public rostrums. I will give two or

three examples to illustrate my point. Towards mid last year, I arrived in my office to find that my email address had been abruptly cancelled by a staffer married to one of the leading lights in the Secretariat. When I formally wrote to the Kenya Social Forum staff committee to document my concerns, I was abruptly hauled into the office of the SODNET Executive Director and given a thirty minute dressing down in front of my peers and subordinates and warned that I was risking dismissal with such complaints. On a second occasion, when I again put in writing my objection to another arbitrary decision, I was given another long tongue lashing, littered with unprintable obscene epithets targeting my spouse's private parts and again threatening me with the sack. The fact that my wife does not and has never worked at the Secretariat made these insults traumatizing not just for me, but for her as well. She was forced to seek counseling for a period. A third incident happened during a meeting of the five social forums from Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Uganda and Somalia that took place in Nairobi days ahead of the IC meeting in March 2006. Again I was publicly bashed and verbally attacked in front of everybody by a Kenyan colleague who sits in the African Social Forum Council and is well known at international WSF gatherings. I was not the only person regularly humiliated, harangued and harassed in public and private because of my penchant for straight talk and hard questions. At the inaugural meeting launching the WSF 2007 Organizing Committee, one member of the Kenya Social Forum's Steering Committee found himself at the wrong end of a ferocious barrage from a very senior founding member of the KSF because of the former's temerity in demanding that the WSF 2007 process be more inclusive, especially at regional levels outside Nairobi. Another KSF Steering Committee member was to discover to his shock that his organization was being suspected of "undermining" the Secretariat- even though it was his organization that had single-handedly paid for the first WSF Organizing Committee meeting when the same Secretariat was utterly devoid of funds.

A mistrustful paranoid siege mentality prevailed at the Secretariat. I remember with some amusement when I was warned, on arrival from Canada to be wary of two funding partners who were considered enemies of the Kenya Social Forum. One happened to be the only funder of the KSF at the time. The other happened to be headed regionally by a well known progressive activist. I simply ignored the warnings and went ahead to set up meetings with the two funders. They turned out to be the most generous supporters of the WSF process at the local level. Another funder who fought ferocious battles within his own organization to avail funds to the Secretariat was later on accused of having a nefarious agenda- when of course the funds from his own organization were already safely residing in the WSF 2007 Secretariat coffers.

I am detailing all this to put into context the milieu that comrades like Trevor Ng'wane were to later encounter when they were shouted down and insulted by the same forces.

Another dastardly thing was the abuse of the race card when it came to dealing with criticism from North American, European and even Indian comrades. I noticed a lot of race baiting especially during the stormy confrontations during the WSF. Some of my colleagues would resort to the most cynical emotional blackmail by dismissing their white skin critics in race loaded terms calculated to silence and stifle debate. At the local Kenyan level poor demonstrators were labeled "glue sucking street urchins from the slums" or "ultra-leftists"-these epithets coming from ex political prisoners who once belonged to clandestine socialist formations in the seventies and the eighties.

Going hand in hand with this imperiousness was infernal micro-management of which I will say more shortly.

XI: The Roles of SODNET, Kenya Social Forum & WSF 2007 Organizing Committee

The World Social Forum came to Nairobi following a successful bid by the Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania Social Forums. The bulk of the initial work was done by the Kenyans with representatives of SODNET, SEATINI and KENDREN playing a very crucial role partly because of their earlier exposure and involvement in the WSF process, having all the WSF events starting with Porto Alegre in 2001.

It was not an accident therefore to find the three organizations dominating the process in Kenya and Eastern Africa.

When I arrived from Canada to take up my post of Kenya Social Forum National Coordinator in Nairobi I found that the offices of the KSF were located at the SODNET offices-which were also shared by SEATINI. Most KSF Steering Committee meetings took place at the SODNET/SEATINI/KSF offices in the upper middle class suburb of Lavington.

At first, I was perplexed at the objections by other KSF Steering Committee members at the idea of KSF offices being embedded within SODNET.

It soon dawned on me that SODNET saw itself as the “focal point” of the Kenya Social Forum, and later the WSF Organizing Committee itself. This notion was bolstered by the legal reality that the KSF was a loose unregistered umbrella body that could not enter into legally binding contracts with funders and therefore deferring this role to SODNET. When I finally got my contract signed (after almost four months of uncertainty) it was to the SODNET Executive Directly that I was directly answerable to on a day to day basis- something that I had no objection to.

Very early on, I discovered that it was funds allocated to Kenya Social Forum that was paying a significant percentage of the overheads of both SEATINI and SODNET. This was partly justifiable because the two organizations were largely doing WSF work and had seconded most, if not all of their employees, volunteers and other staff to planning for Nairobi 2007.

One immediate consequence of this was the gradual relegation of the Kenya Social Forum to the background. This was at least partly due to the lethargy that permeated the KSF Steering Committee with many of its members not bothering to show up for meetings despite constant reminders. Another reason had to do with the conviction of the SODNET head honchos (who were also heavily involved in the SEATINI and KENDREN boards) that they were the true keepers of the WSF flame in Kenya and had earned the right through their involvement in the African Social Forum and the WSF to be in the driver’s seat.

At a personal level, it meant that as time went on, I was viewed as just another SODNET employee (which I was NOT) rather than the National Coordinator of the Kenya Social Forum. Indeed many of my professional functions were gradually whittled down and/or usurped. Contrary to expectations, I was NOT one of the mandatory signatories to the KSF accounts neither was I called upon to participate in key financial decisions. In hindsight, this may very well turn out to be a blessing in disguise but I will not say more... Since all the members of the Secretariat were either SODNET or SEATINI employees absorbed into the Kenya Social Forum I found that I had practically NO SUPERVISORY AUTHORITY because they all saw themselves answering directly either to the SODNET Executive Director or the SEATINI Country Director. I will not go into detail to talk about some surreal situations where I got orders from people who were actually subordinate to me giving me deadlines to execute their requests.

Matters took a turn for the worse with the arrival of the development workers seconded to the Secretariat by MS Kenya. The irony of the whole thing was that it was I who had developed their job descriptions, interviewed some of them and made approvals on all of them before they landed at our offices. I developed an orientation plan and training module that would be implemented following their arrival in mid August 2006. Five minutes before our initial meeting with the development workers I was instructed NOT TO DISTRIBUTE the handouts detailing this orientation and training plan. At the meeting itself, two of the key organizers took over the process-at some point introducing the rest of the Secretariat, including myself as “watu wa mkono” (hired hands) even as they described their own titles.

From that point on, the development workers, who were practically volunteers, were valorized higher than people like myself who were supposed to be management and other senior local staffers at the Secretariat. In the months and weeks leading up to the WSF event, the development workers were practically at par with the hand picked executives running the show with people like myself shunted to the background and simultaneously accused of “abandoning the process”. In one macabre moment towards the end of 2006 we received a strange email announcing that one of the foreign volunteers had been appointed “Acting Director” of SODNET (when the CEO was out of the country for a few days) to whom we would all be answerable to, including someone like myself who had help draw up the job description and participated in the hiring of the same volunteer. This was of course, in flagrant disregard and total violation of the development worker’s contract and work permit. This high profile of the foreign volunteers within the Secretariat drew comments from as far away as Parma, Italy where members of the IC of the WSF noticed with some disquiet that a non-African and a non-Kenyan was the person assigned to do the media and publicity work at the Secretariat.

By December 2006 I was no longer being briefed on key aspects of the planning for WSF 2007 and was being deliberately left out of delegations to crucial meetings with Kenya government officials (who often called me directly to inquire why I was not present at such meetings) and WSF technical consultations in Nairobi, Dakar, Parma, Brussels and elsewhere. In the meantime, my high flying colleagues were busy telling ASF and IC members that “Onyango Oloo cannot be trusted”-something I found out directly from our comrades from the India Social Forum and European Social Forum who were disgusted with what they could see with their own eyes at these meetings, starting with IC meeting in March 2006.

It is in this context that I ask, two months after WSF Nairobi 2007:

Has the Kenya Social Forum been conflated with and subsumed by SODNET?

Will the Kenya Social Forum reassert its autonomy from SODNET or will key SODNET personalities keep on presenting SODNET goals and aspirations as if these were synonymous with the Kenya Social Forum?

Where is the oversight structure that makes SODNET answerable to the Kenya Social Forum rather than vice versa?

XII: The Way Forward

Here are some of the things that should be done immediately:

(a) Convening of a Public Report Back Session for the Kenya Social Forum to allow member organizations and the public to raise the questions and demand answers regarding the management

of the WSF 2007 process;

(b) Calling an extra-ordinary WSF 2007 Organizing Committee with representatives from Tanzania, Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia in attendance as members and ASF council members and IC delegates coming as observers to evaluate WSF 2007;

(c) Arranging a party for all the WSF Nairobi 2007 volunteers-after paying all lingering dues to the same;

(d) Conducting a thorough external audit of the finances advanced to support the WSF 2007 process. This would help among other things to explain how we acquired a 20 million shilling deficit and perhaps exonerate those members of the WSF 2007 Secretariat who may have been wrongly accused of stealing public funds;

(e) Organizing post forum activities throughout Kenya and Eastern Africa;

(f) Sending recommendations to the IC of the WSF about how to do things differently in the future;

(g) Revamping and reinvigorating the Kenya Social Forum and its constituent members;

I will leave it there for now.

Sincerely,

Onyango Oloo

National Coordinator

Kenya Social Forum

Nairobi, Kenya

March 19, 2007

P.S.

* Onyango Oloo is National Coordinator, Kenya Social Forum.