

## 10 + 1 REASONS

### WHY THE WSF 2007 SHOULD NOT COME TO SOUTH AFRICA

1. South Africa (SA) is a neo-liberal state and no “better” than any African state in this regard. In my opinion SA is worse because, as a middle income economy in Africa, it has, at least theoretically, more space to resist imperialism’s neo-liberal impositions than other poorer African states. Instead of using its limited breathing space SA has chosen rather the role of a perpetrator and conniver in strengthening and spreading neo-liberalism on the continent. During recent WTO ministerial negotiations the SA government has mostly come out on the side of the imperialist countries against the position of its fellow African and southern countries. The SA government has at times exerted pressure on SADC states trying to coerce them into adopting neo-liberal policies. Instead of using its position of relative strength to resist neo-liberalism SA has opted to join the exploiter and play the game according to capitalist rules e.g. GEAR is a form of structural adjustment programme which most African were coerced to adopt by the World Bank and IMF but the SA government voluntarily adopted.
2. Too many conferences and international events are coming to SA, namely, the WSSD, WCAR, international HIV/AIDS, rugby world cup, soccer world cup 2010, etc. This is unfair on other African countries; they too must be given an opportunity to host important international events and showcase their countries and get whatever benefits accrue from hosting such events. It is not right that SA should exploit its economic and political ascendancy to dominate African events. This ascendancy is an inheritance from SA’s ruthless and predatory capitalist policy in the past and the struggle this endangered. Lest we forget, the wealth, economic development and superior infrastructure found in (certain parts of) SA are the spoils from the past super-exploitation of black labour in the mines and factories. This labour was sourced from all over Africa notably Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe etc. Nor should we uncritically accept SA’s credentials as the model democratic country in Africa. A lie beloved by the international and local bourgeoisie is that the people’s victory over apartheid was a “miracle” born of political good will, reasonableness, reconciliation and letting bygones be bygones. Nothing could be further from the truth! The victory over apartheid was no miracle. It was achieved on the backs of millions of ordinary workers who suffered, many of them dying, for centuries and decades under the evil capitalist system in SA. Remember the Sharpeville massacre, the June 16 uprising, the Vaal 1984 uprising, etc. Remember how Stephen Biko, Chris Hani, and many other leaders were murdered. It was the struggle of the millions and millions and the attendant sacrifices by numerous rank and file people that made possible the new democratic SA. Remember the sacrifices many African countries gave in the struggle against apartheid: hosting our guerillas, receiving fugitives from apartheid, sticking to their guns in their principled opposition to apartheid in international forums and so on. Mozambique, Angola and Namibia are countries which were wrecked by the apartheid psychopaths because they stood with us against statutory racism. If it was not for apartheid’s destabilization policies these countries would be much more developed than they are today. Samora Machel,

the Mozambican socialist president, paid with his life when the apartheid state crashed his airplane at Mbuluzi near Nelspruit because he stood firm against apartheid under very difficult circumstances.

3. SA has so far failed to repay the debt it owes to African states and peoples who sacrificed to help us attain our freedom and the world acclaim we enjoy today as the most democratic and progressive country in Africa. Indeed, Mbeki's opposition to apartheid-financing reparations and default on odious apartheid debt remains one of the biggest stumbling blocks to international financial reform. Instead, SA has chosen to play the role of a sub-imperialist power, encouraging its big capitalists and bankers to re-colonise Africa through taking over African businesses and resources. The mining houses like Anglo and DeBeers have locked up much of the mineral wealth; ESKOM is buying African power stations for privatisation; Vodacom and MTN are cornering the African cellular market; Shoprite Checkers is not only demolishing the African retail sector but is also changing buying patterns away from even local produce to imports; SABreweries has devoured many African beer manufacturers; the Johannesburg banks are marching up the continent; For many companies, profits that flow from Africa to South Africa, then flow out to London which is the site of their new financial headquarters. Does such a country's bourgeoisie deserve to be "rewarded" once again - but this time by our movement, the global justice movement, a movement expressly formed to fight against imperialism and the rich getting richer?
4. South African capitalists would love nothing better than to further enrich themselves through the WSF. They may even claim to help the global justice movement by providing services and facilities in Johannesburg (at a price). We have seen a bit of this in Porto Alegre where the right wing mayor openly hates and despises our movement but publicly states his love for the money the WSF brings to this Brazilian city which the PT (workers' party) lost control of in the last elections. Prices shot up in Porto as the local capitalists and international airlines made a killing from an event purportedly aimed at fighting against a system which puts profits before people. The hotel groups owned by the likes of Sol Kerzner, SAB's breweries, the chain stores, and other notorious South African capitalists – not forgetting the emergent black bourgeoisie and their allies in the ANC government – would love us if we brought the WSF to these shores.
5. South Africa does not convincingly reflect the cultural, political and economic conditions in Africa if that is what the WSF seeks to find out by coming to Africa. And even where there are similarities with African countries, it is unlikely that the people coming to the WSF would be adequately exposed to the realities faced by the South African working class and the poor. Most delegates will content themselves to shuttling between the seminar venues and their hallowed and comfortable hotel rooms and B&Bs; they will be encouraged to do so by the hysterical warnings they will get from the bourgeois press and the middle classes about crime in SA. In Porto Alegre people were sticking to their air-conditioned rooms just because of the heat! As a result the true condition of the Brazilian working class, in particular, that of the Afro-Brazilians, is unknown to many who went to attend WSF 2005. What indeed is the point of taking the WSF to Africa and then choosing to have it in a country which in many respects is most unlike

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Africa. It is like taking someone to Sandton in the name of showing them what life is really like in Johannesburg for the masses.

6. The South African political and economic elite, in particular, President Mbeki and the (black and white) bourgeoisie and its political corps, will take full advantage of the WSF and use it to promote their hegemonic ambitions in Africa. Already NEPAD is increasingly revealing itself as a cover for Mbeki's bid to go down in history as the leading African statesman in the globalization-afflicted new millennium. Obasanjo, Bouteflika, Wade and other African neo-liberal leaders are contesting Mbeki on this but the WSF in SA would certainly strengthen his hand. He will in all likelihood project himself as the Lula of Africa. Lula has already unwittingly (or perhaps wittingly) opened the door to this by his dubious G3 project where Brazil, India and SA are meant to lead the world's poor countries by being the main cocks on top of the neo-liberal dunghill of the south.
7. Mandela has been – wrongly – projected by the naïve left and the far-sighted right as the political saint of the new millennium. If the WSF in 2007 finds him alive and politically active this will be a source of great confusion to many activists and NGOers coming to SA. He will be the neo-liberals' trump card. No doubt the bourgeoisie and political elite will use him to make fantastic claims about how progressive SA is and how much is being done for the poor and why the world should support the South African government's capitalist machinations. Don't be surprised if Bill Gates and Bono end up in the WSF rather than in Davos with the aim of grabbing a photo opportunity with St. Mandela. And Mandela will charm everyone and tell the world how he is a disciplined member of the ANC and answerable to "the movement" (not to be confused with the anti-capitalist movement). Gracious as always he won't attack anyone and use epithets like "ultra lefts" but will leave this important duty to Mbeki, Ngonyama, Nzimande et al.
8. The WSF's coming to SA will not challenge South African social movements, trade unions, progressive NGOs and research institutes to broaden their social base by working harder and closer to the ground. But this is exactly what is required of them at this crucial moment in history, in particular, to extend their work beyond South Africa's borders and endeavour to unite the continent around an anti-capitalist platform and programme. Instead, if the WSF comes to SA, they will get complacent in their comfort zones and assume the posture of the South African bourgeoisie vis-à-vis African movements because their "leading role" in Africa will be confirmed without them having to lift a finger. Sadly some lefts in the movements and the unions are already talking the same language as the capitalists and their surrogate funding organizations; they express their doubts about whether any other country in Africa besides SA can make a "success" of the WSF. Africa is in a mess and South Africa is the exception. That was Verwoerd's and Vorster's rationalisation of apartheid, remember? The South African capitalists justify their plunder of African business and markets using the same argument. The South African movement and union leaders seem to be speaking the same language in relation to their exploited and oppressed brothers and sisters in the rest of Africa. What a shame.

9. The WSF will prove to be divisive and damaging to the re-invigorated struggle in SA and Africa. A complicated repeat of the tensions and divisions that visited us during the World Summit on Sustainable Development is bound to happen. Except there will be no World Bank and IMF to unite against and thus help us to clarify our positions against neo-liberalism and exposing the vacillators and collaborators. There will be no repeat of the great march from Alexander to Sandton to forge our anti-capitalist platform because the WSF is usually a medley of activities which absorbs the energies of activists and blurs their political focus. With the WSF defined as an open “space” where any organization can stage an activity the genuine anti-capitalist movements will be swamped in the bog marsh of endless workshops and seminars and exhibitions allowing the reformists to do their dirty work under cover of the open space, horizontal decision-making and the *laissez faire* atmosphere. The SABC will not be promoting the anti-capitalist side nor will the funders fall over themselves giving us money to stage more events. We will have no choice but to fight for the visibility and hegemony of our anti-capitalist platform and ideas but I foresee a spirited but frustrated contestation by the genuine left given the odds against us.
10. The East African sub-region of the African Social Forum has already submitted a proposal (“bid”) to hold the WSF in Nairobi, Kenya. No other sub-region or country has done so and we are left with barely 2 months before the WSF international council makes its final decision at the end of March. If SA were to submit their proposal now I think it will create tensions and divisions. This won’t contribute to building unity in Africa nor help reduce the resentment some African comrades already feel towards SA. I think it would be a mistake to develop a “fall back position” which involves us writing (and submitting) a South African bid in order to pre-empt any other organization doing so. The SMI took a clear position against the WSF coming to Africa because it felt that too many events are coming to SA to the exclusion of other African countries. Everyone including ourselves will be totally confused if we now develop our own bid. Comrades from Kenya and East Africa made a point of asking for South African comrades’ support for their bid in Porto Alegre. When the SMI discusses this issue my suggestion will be that we should stick to supporting the East African bid. Kenya, like SA, also has a rich history of struggle and movements. Kenya is the land of the legendary Mau Mau; Kenyan movements were recently part of their victorious mass mobilization to get rid of the dictator Arap Moi. Our job as South African comrades is to build on Kenya and East Africa’s strengths and help them overcome their weakness where these are identified.
11. The vision of the African Social Forum is to make the WSF 2007 the biggest initiative and meeting in post-colonial Africa. All African countries got their independence but *uhuru* is bound by capitalist chains. In 2007 it will be 5 years of NEPAD and the occasion can be used to evaluate this capitalist policy and expose those leaders who champion it. Going to Kenya will be our chance to take the message of resistance and grassroots struggle to Africa as we understand it. Africa has a lot to teach us. Apartheid cut us off from the rest of Africa. It is better to get to know a person by visiting them in their house and neighbourhood rather than inviting them over to your own place. Let us work with our comrades in East

Africa and other parts of Africa and other continents to prepare for the WSF 2007 through mass mobilization. If we want to connect to the African masses outside our borders we should think of filling a 100 buses and going to Nairobi rather than expect the African masses to jet into SA. When we get to Nairobi we should organise to sleep in tents and with villagers in their houses and community halls. It is time to get out of our comfort zones, to eschew insular and inward-looking methods of struggle and ways of doing things. It is time to climb Mount Kilimanjaro and from this vantage point see the whole of Africa. Africa is a canvass and through struggle waged together with our fellow exploited African brothers and sisters we can paint a new future, a future without capitalism. Let us go to Kenya in 2007.